This 2025

Selected Verse

of

Voices from Behind the Mask
replaces all previous poetry publications
which should be pitched or recycled.

Voices from Behind the Mask:
Amended, Improved & Updated

by

David B. McCoy

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Folks over the years who have assisted
in the crafting of these poems:

Mary Ann D'Aurelio
David Huthmacher
Sandy Shrigley
Sandy Ballard
Ruth Fuquen
Peggy Brunyansky
Phyllis Lee
Robert Miltner
Rhonda Baughman

Spare Change Press®
Massillon, OH 44646
sparechangepress79@gmail.com

I admit that I am a minor poet.
I anticipate neither fortune nor fame.
I am confident, though, that one day
my poems will plague the world.

Although I know it's unfair
I reveal myself one mask at a time.

Stephen Dunn

YOU CALL THIS POETRY?
THERE'S NO RHYME, NO METER!

Imagist poetry emerged during the second decade of the Twentieth Century and became the mainstream of the Modernist movement. It was a reactionary movement against Romantic and Victorian compositions that embraced rhyme, metrical cadence, and sentimentality. The sonnet was a popular form.

Example of a poem with rhyme and meter:

> FOR MY SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT
>
> So hard to understand why words won't flow—
> his tongue and lips are stiff as frozen rope.
> In class his mates a-laugh and watch him grope
> for words too deep to whip the air he woes.
> But tension (bottled tight) demands release
> in time, and midst his patient vow to cope—
> he yanks my hair and finds a solemn peace.

The new Imagist form provided models for artistic experimentation, while at the same time, stressing new fundamentals of poetic form, such as imagery (the use of vivid or figurative language to represent objects, actions, or ideas), brevity (concise

expression; terseness), and free verse (an open form that does not use consistent meter patterns or rhyme).

A poem lacking rhyme and meter:

RELIEF

There’s a young special needs guy
who lives in our neighborhood.

He rides around in the afternoon on
his bike from the 1950s, wearing
headphones and carrying a transistor radio.

I enjoy seeing him, and almost envy him—
he always seems so happy.

Yet, I see him only in the world
he has somehow managed to create—
a world of music, lyrics, and
the rhythms of his bicycle.

It’s ironic that I use rhythms of verse
to give my life meaning, to help me see,
while he uses rhythms to find relief
from a less-than-understanding world.

In March 1913, *Poetry Magazine* published what some consider to be the Imagist Manifesto.

1. Direct treatment of the “thing," whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.

On the controversy over the movement, Ezra Pound responded, “One ‘discards rhyme,’ not because one is incapable of rhyming neat, fleet, sweet, meet, treat, eat, feet, but because there are certain emotions or energies which are not to be represented by the over-familiar devices or patterns.” In the same vein, another Imagist poet wrote, “The free verse poet … tastefully ignores the straitjackets of end-of-line rhyming and formulaic line counts and metric conventions.”

By the end of the decade, Imagism had been experimented with by new and veteran poets and was widely accepted by the reading public.

First Impressions

POETRY IS…

that butterfly you were assigned
to catch back in elementary school

once winter broke and spring emerged.

The moment you saw its flutter
of orange, off you ran with a cheesecloth
net fixed to a long wooden pole.

With your best ambitions, you raised the net far
above your head and came down
fast and hard and caught … nothing.

An ache to catch that delicate
trickster settled in: soon you tried again
and again came down with nothing.

You then hid behind a bush and
waited for it to fly to you—quickly
snatching it right out of mid-air.

And what better way have I to
explain the process of my poetry
than through your not-too-simple task?

—words elusive, delicate, and
tricky until I net them with my pen
and arrange them into poems.

THIS BIKE
Like an archeologist, we try to glean
facts from this rusted and neglected
bike left leaning against an old shed.
But beyond knowing the tires are flat,
the chain is frozen, the seat is worn & ragged,
we know this bike isn't destined for the dump.
Perhaps this bike, for the many miles
of pleasure it gave its owner, has been
awarded this quiet place of rest.
Poem by David McCoy
Photo by Ron McCoy

THIS BIKE

Inspired by Ron McCoy's photograph

Like an archeologist, we try to glean
facts from this rusted and neglected
bike left leaning against an old shed.

But beyond knowing the tires are flat,
the chain is frozen, the seat is worn &
ragged,
we know this bike isn’t destined for the
dump.

Perhaps this bike, for the many miles
of pleasure it gave its owner, has been
awarded this quiet place of rest.

BIRDING

Some men need hobbies
to save them from their wives.
Fishing and hunting
take too much effort.
Fixing up old cars
has never appealed to me.
Stamp or coin collecting?
It's best to get out of the house.

Birding—that's a safe one;
you don't even need to learn
the names, the calls.
Just get out of the house
a few hours and return
home prattling on about
the blue jays, those damned
grackles, or the arrival of red-
winged black birds.

On mornings after an argument,
you can return and go on
for hours about a possible
pileated woodpecker sighting.
Truth is, in the end it doesn't
much matter: you both know
why you're really out there.

TABASCO SAUCE

There's an old cowboy joke:

I've been married so long I'm on
my second bottle of Tabasco sauce.

In both of my previous marriages,
I made it to the second bottle,
and both marriages went bad.

I'll be damned if you think I'm
buying any more *Tabasco* sauce
heading into this third marriage.

FAR NEIGHBOR

The land is more sacred
than it is beautiful.

A rain wraps itself once
about trees and stiffens.
It cracks when bent by wind.

I see my far neighbor
walking the stream as I.
Something lures us both here.

A strange old man. Seems to
know that Truth has no words.

GNAT SEQUENCE

Gnats
define
wind.

Gnats
levitate—
disappear.

Gnats
regroup—
drift.

Gnat
cloud
hovers.

Gnats
defy
rain.

Gnat
draws
blood.

AUGUST 12th

This day is more than a cool day of summer.
It is the first true evidence of the earth’s
positioning of the sun’s rays towards the
Tropic of Capricorn. It is the signal
for trees to end their photosynthesis
and allow their leaves to usher autumn in
with a flare. It’s when the earth passes
through the orbit of a now defunct comet,
and the scattering particles, no bigger
than a fist, alight the night sky.

This cool day means comfort in sleep.

MY UNCLE’S FORD EDSEL

In memory of Clarence Baker

I was too young to understand
the concepts of beauty or style,
but the day my uncle from
Meigs County, Ohio, drove up
in his new Ford Edsel, I knew
it was the work of angels.

A few years later when the whole
Edsel project turned into an
economic fiasco, I found myself
on the long road of doubt
as to God’s reliability.

CRUISING, 1973

For Rhonda

It was our senior high school year.
Rhonda and I were cruising
back roads in Pennsylvania.
And though it was a dark,
moonless night in early winter,
I was brashly driving too fast.

The moment we flew over one
small knoll they were there—
standing stock still in front of the car—
their eyes glowing like candles:
Eight deer. I slammed on the brakes—
preventing an explosion of fur, muscle
and steel—preventing, perhaps,
our own deaths.

That was twenty years ago.
But from that night on,
like the dull ache some feel right
before the weather is about to change,

I have felt the movement of deer in my
bones.

LEARNING TO FLY

From my patio I am watching
a fledgling bird learning to fly.

It reminds me of the first
intelligible thing I managed
to write in sixth grade—
some story about a guy
with a square head living
on the moon.

It was pathetic, I was pathetic,
yet my mother and teacher applied,
best they could without seeming
like phonies, positive reinforcement.

For a moment I flew—legs running
as fast as my flapping arms;
but many times thereafter
there would be stray dogs who
would nearly devour me.

This morning, watching
that fledgling bird, I am willing
to nail any dog who dares
enter our yard.

OUR CRAZY AUNT JANE

1.
By prismed windows
Crazy Jane sits
listening to
melodies of light.

2.
Janie doesn’t frown anymore;
she’s forgotten its purpose,
or found that frowning does no good.

3.
Some days Janie likes
the way she makes herself laugh.

BURNING SPRINGS, WV, 1960

My grandparents,
before they got too up in years,
ran the big old Blair farm located
in the Little Kanawha River valley
just a piece up the road
from the Burning Springs “General”—
food store, post office, and
gas station all rolled into one.

Visiting them was to visit a foreign land:
A well for water stood next to the house;
kerosene lamps hung on the walls;
a heavy metal hand iron, when not in use,
propped open the kitchen door; and chickens!
—kept in a coop out behind the house.

Grandma McCoy knew I loved chickens
and invited me one morning
to help her with the feeding.
Once inside the pen,
she handed me a tin can of feed
with instructions to “throw it out
in front of them and watch them eat it
up.”
And by God, in what a flurry of white
they ate!

My aunts, too, standing together,
wearing long white aprons,
were enjoying themselves.
I also noticed they were pointing
in my direction— “yes, yes, that big bold
one trying to get all the food, let it be
first.”

“First,” a signal to my grandmother
to ring her fingers around its neck,
carry it to a large wooden stump,
and cut off its head.

Instantly, it began jumping / running
around the pen—blood spurting
everywhere:
a burning spring of blood
that caused my head to spin.

::

Sometimes, in one’s life,

things connect and all is made clear.
This would be one of those times,
and no one expected me for dinner.

FRIEZE OF DANCERS

After Edgar Degas

Degas painted
four dancers
preparing for

a performance

Degas painted
the dancers
sitting in
four chairs

Degas painted
the four dancers
lacing up
their slippers

Degas painted
one dancer
from four
points of view

GEORGE WASHINGTON CROSSING THE DELAWARE

(A poem in two voices)
After Emanuel Leutze

The hint of orange pekoe
that drifts through this wind
conjures thoughts of apple pie
she bakes with care.
(*Row. Row.)*

Those hands, as warm and smooth

as fresh goat's milk, glides
one piping hot wedge from pan
to Canton ware.
(*Row. Row.)*

The clank of forks on plates
resounds the door when
opened by her father—stern
in Puritan ways.
(*Row. Row.*)

And when it closed, we knew
commitments to be soon fulfilled.
By summer's end.
Lord saw us wed.
(*Row. Row.*)

Reared a Tory, father
was. Failing him in
war and marriage makes him sad
and bends him low.
(*Row. Row.*)

Equally, I am sad
—but to reject
the Olive Branch leaves
only one alternative.
(*Row. Row.)*

So numb and stiff and raw
these hands have turned—
as much this oar as all its wood:
A burn of coals.

(*Row. Row.*)

Ahead a sheet of ice
appears to be afloat.
Does Washington not
see it? (*Row, soldier.*
Row. Row.)

SUSANNA AND THE ELDERS
After Thomas Hart Benton

Never in her life had Susanna
revealed her flesh to the open air,

nor did she ever think she’d see the day
when there would be only a stream to bathe in;

but as her foot breaks through the flat surface
she is suddenly aware of her new reality.

Hardly less than lecherous voyeurs,
the elders Susanna has come to visit

look on from a distance as she slips into the stream,
telling themselves they’ve come to ensure her safety;

ashamed to admit their excitement—reminded
of their brides now stern and rough from work.

THE SLEEPING GYPSY

After Henri Rousseau

A gypsy
has fallen
into sleep
next to her
6-string lute
& carafe.

The moon is
full & round;
a few stars
speckle blue.
Hills in the
distance look
like…hills.

Some lion
keeps walking
into & out
of the scene,

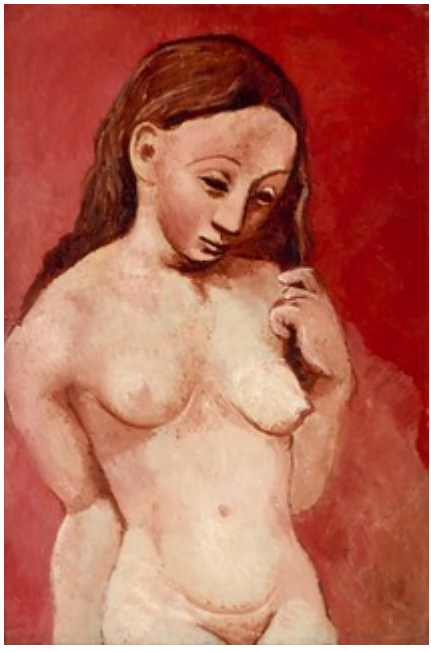
half-hoping
to get in
the picture.
CROWS

After Andrew Wyeth

Wyeth has nailed
to the side of his
pale-white woodshed,
like game left to age,
two large crows.

It is a message
crows understand.

FIRST IMPRESSION OF THE NUDE # 33



Patiently she waits:
standing there like a
Picasso of his Rose Period —
        thighs flapping inward
        with her head and torso
        slightly deformed.

She exerts her strength
in the way she mounts her hands
on those adolescently fat hips
        without losing the firmness
        of her breasts. Her smile seems

to reveal our intimidation.

RELIEF

There’s a young special needs guy
who lives in our neighborhood.

He rides around in the afternoon on
his bike from the 1950s, wearing
headphones and carrying a transistor radio.

I enjoy seeing him, and almost envy him—
he always seems so happy.

Yet, I see him only in the world
he has somehow managed to create—
a world of music, lyrics, and
the rhythms of his bicycle.

It’s ironic that I use rhythms of verse
to give my life meaning, to help me see,
while he uses rhythms to find relief
from a less than understanding world.

FOR MY SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENT

So hard to understand why words won’t
flow—
his tongue and lips are stiff as frozen
rope.
In class his mates a-laugh and watch him
grope
for words too deep to whip the air he
woes.
But tension (bottled tight) demands
release
in time, and midst his patient vow to cope
—
he yanks my hair and finds a solemn
peace.

LOVE IS A PLEASANT COUNTRY

Written for Marcia and Lester's wedding.
A variation on E. E. Cummings.

Sail down long and winding rivers,
and allow currents to be your guide.

Walk together across smooth running plains,
yet fear not to climb rugged mountains.

Be not discouraged by the falling of leaves,
in due time your tree will flourish again.

When called, scatter seeds for new life,
thereby ensuring your posterity.

Be dedicated, honest, and sincere
to this, your country of love,

and freedom and growth
will be your rewards.

Yes, love is a pleasant country.

WOOD

Our wood
is of good
quality
this year.

Last year
it was soft
& burned way
too soon.

Good wood
is much like
good love—it
burns long.

SQUASH

Huddled in the vegetable drawer,
secluded from all activity and light,
you timidly sit and wait—

(as did our cat the day we found him
at the pound near the back of his cage,
too weak and frightened
to venture out into the open).

June? July? When did you arrive?
Already it is January,
and yet you wait.
Paler now.
Softer.

I close the drawer.

The cat in this poem was named “Cloud” and lived 18 years.

SPRING HARVEST

Spring begins the same each year,
no matter how well we’ve
picked fields clean years prior.

The earth seems to send them up
through its thin skin of dirt

like…

boils
sweat
warts.

Each year before planting,
we walk behind carts

harvesting more rocks.

INTRUDERS

For Phil Grimm

Intruders! That's all we'll ever be.
We don't have gods—the Cosmos is too great,
complex, and self-inclusive to foresee
a power above who mandates our fate.
Only from the soft silence of the earth
might we begin to learn the meaning and
truth of life—ending myths of man's birth
with facts of migration from sea to land.

Of course, religions do have their function
of structuring man's life. But you and I?
We stand in awe of the earth's creation
and of the celestial forces which drive
our expanding universe. And in
so being, some accuse us of sin.

THEME SONG

For Wally Trace

Wally asks the new wide-eye busser
“What’s your theme song?
  Everybody’s got a theme song.
    What’s yours?”

The busser is confused. Not sure

whether the question is actually
directed toward him.

My pity for the new kid is replaced
by my own groping for what I think
would be my theme song.

Copeland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*?
(Granted, my ego's big, but not that big.)

Maybe that song by Blood, Sweet, & Tears
with the line:
I can swear there ain't no Heaven
*but I pray there ain't no hell.**

No…it's a Mellencamp tune:
Your Life Is Now.

I like the ideas in the song—
teaching kids the truth,
taking the high road,
keeping our heads up above the clouds,

I like the line,
This is your time here
to do what you will do.

And it is: It’s my life;
it’s my time;
and I’m doing what I want to do.

* Written by Laura Nyro (October 18, 1947 – April 8, 1997).

VIGGO
6 February 2020

Tonight, a cosmic snowball of gasses, rocks, and dust is gracefully passing overhead as a brightly lit comet with a tail streaming across the sky for miles and miles.

And while it will soon fade from sight to continue its elongated orbit around the sun in the Kuiper Belt, it will never fade from our memories, our dreams, or our hearts.

SANDY HAS WRITTEN A POEM ABOUT POTATOES

Written during the late 1970s

As Sandy shares her images aloud,
I am taken by her description
of the skin being wrinkled
like that of an old women.

I see it quite differently,
though I don't tell her so.
I see the soft, dark skin
of the mulatto girl I once knew

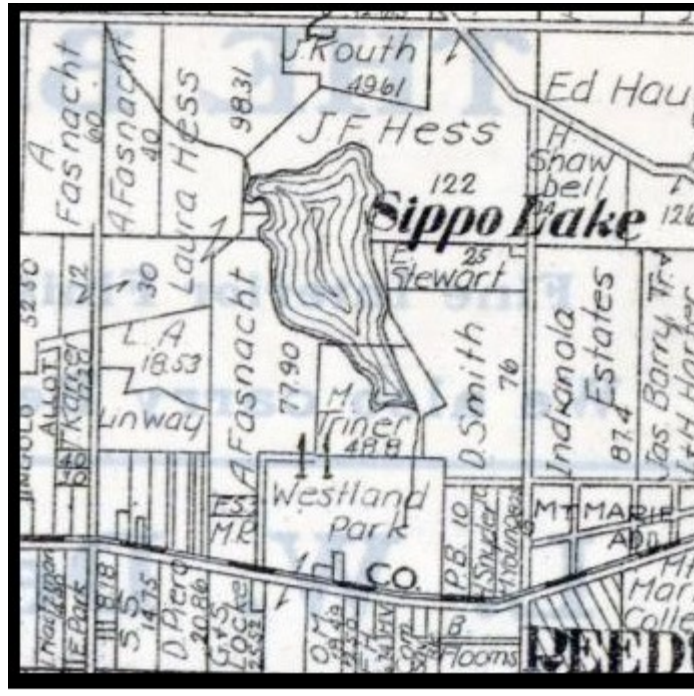
and the god-awful brown land,
heavily poxed with buttes,
reserved for Indians somewhere out West.

I think of my uncle and cousins
hammering through Meigs County soil
for a harvest that will never
yield enough for sale

and think of how it will be
to peel potatoes every night for supper,
now that I've told my wife
I don't love her
and our marriage must end.

For the first time in my life,
I feel the wrinkles on my face.

The Sippo Lake Poems


J. Routh
1961
Ed Hau
J.F. Hess
122
Sippo Lake
A Fasnacht
40
A Fasnacht
40
Laura Hess
9831
H. Shawbell
Stewart
25
Indianola Estates
87.4
Jas Barry Tr.
L.A.
18.53
Linway
A Fasnacht
77.90
M. Tiner
4.88
D. Smith
76
Westland Park
MT MARIE
ADD
CO.
P.B. 10
Snyder
Hoover
Locke
Blooms

THE SIPPO LAKE POEMS

…poems are not
the point. Finding again the world,
that is the point…
Howard Nemerov

Sippo Lake was constructed in 1844, by James Duncan, founder of Massillon. A 300 feet dam stretched across Sippo Creek along today’s Jackson Avenue/27th Street to create a power source for Mr. Duncan’s mill. However, when the lake's water became stagnant, nearby resi-dents complained of the smell and claimed mosquitos were spreading disease. When calls for the dam's removal failed, on February 23, 1848, saboteurs axed the pilings and the dam collapsed. A ten-foot-high wave traveled at approximately 100 miles an hour towards downtown Massillon

The remaining section of the lake, and land sur-rounding it, were purchased in 1977 with a Community Development Block Grant because of its central location between two of Stark County's major cities. The lake is located be-tween Canton and Massillon between Genoa Road on the west and Perry Drive on the east, and also between 12th Street on the north and Lincoln Way East on the south. It provides visitors with a variety of amen-ities, programs, and 202 acres of deciduous forest, wetlands, old fields, and mixed shrub areas.

THE KINGDOM

Not believing my new neighbor,
who told me one afternoon,

There's nothing but swamp
once you get past that thick
jumble of vines and briars,

I braved those vines,
those prickly plants,
the poison ivy

and entered a kingdom
of solid ground which
I claimed as my own.

THE CAIRN

Cairn: a mound of stones piled up as a memorial or as a landmark

At my last place of residency,
I walked the rolling fields

and built with my son a
stone cairn several feet high.

Now it is time to
explore the 202-acre park

behind our new home—
knowing that instead of stone,

the cairn I will erect

will be built with words.

THE WALK

Leave behind the phone,
  the pager,
    the iPod.

Leave behind the mail,
  the magazines,
    the books.

Leave behind the TV,
  the computer,
    the Xbox.

Leave behind the car,

the bicycle,
the house.

Leave it all behind!
Go grab an old hat,
a strong walking stick,

and join me on my walk
through the park.

THE ISLAND

After swimming through
the sea of dense brush
that surrounds this
northern section of the park,

and landing on what seems
a deserted, unpopulated island,
I begin to wonder if I am,
in fact, the first in generations
to tread on this soil.

While looking around,

I name those who have
walked here before me:
pioneers, Indians, mammoths.

This isolation of land,
in its vastness,
causes me to feel small,
and as I repeat the list
over and over again—

pioneers, Indians, mammoths,
pioneers, Indians, mammoths—

I begin to feel myself go invisible.

THE PATH

The Buddhist monk who
practices walking meditation
would like this place…
Paths are wide and wind about
so as not to allow one
to see where he's been or
where he's going.

Plants that grow along the path's edge
are tall and keep one's wandering
attention focused:

First one foot moves, then the other,
with concentration centering
on the body's shifting weight,
the hanging hands,
the breath.

Sometimes, I too, practice this
form of meditation, asking myself
the same question the Chinese poet
Tu Fu asked himself:

Why have I let an official career
steer me from my goal?

THE NIGHT

A moonless night:
only the stars,
a few planets,
dim arcs of light
from the refinery
from Belden
from Canton
from Massillon.

Before me,

complete blackness
until,
like a curtain,
the blackness lifts
to reveal
plants,
the trail,
steam rising from a pond.

I carry
in my pocket,
just in case,
a small flashlight
which,
to my surprise,
is unnecessary
even on
a moonless night.

THE WIND

The wind…

The wind…

The wind pours out across the land with
the force of water thrown from a bucket.

Boughs break…

Leaves fly…

Stray paper tumbles…

Pollen and dust clouds form…

And the wind?

The wind…

The wind pours out across the land with
the force of water thrown from a bucket.

THE INTRUDER

I could hold them in one hand,
these rabbits on the path before me!

Still young, they do not fear anything
that is not an immediate threat

(and some will not learn quickly
enough to fear the circling shadow).

But for today, I am the sole
intruder into their world of play

that will be disrupted by a watchful
mother only if I get too close.

THE MOON

A full moon
casts pale shadows.

Only a few lone
leaves tumble down.

A hint of decay

fills the wind.

Already
we anticipate snow.

THE DUCKS

Tall brown
cotton-topped reeds
encircle this
adjacent pond.
Swimming
side-by-side

appear to be
the only two ducks
left in the park.

Too attracted
to one another,
they ignore
my passing.
Within a month,
this small pond
will be covered
with ice, forcing
them to the lake
and out into public.

Oh, what a pity
that would be.
They seem so
content together,
side by side,
and alone.

THE BARK

In the bark of trees
live some of the animals
that went before.

Many more live
within the rings,

but only those
in the bark
can you see,
can you touch.

Sometimes, I
like to rub my face
against the cool bark
to feel their warmth.

Sometimes, I
wrap my arms
around a tree
to feel their breathing.

***

When I die,
I wish to be
buried under
a young tree.

I, too, yearn
to make the journey
through roots
and xylem,
finding solace
within the bark
and rings.

THE SINGING

I’ve heard
the stories
of this place.

A time before roads,
before houses,
before the plow.

A time when
the French
claimed this land,

and Indians
from surrounding tribes
gathered

to fish,
to powwow,
to trade prisoners.

I don’t know
if any of it
is true,

but within the
steady rhythms
of Canton Drop Forge,

I swear, sometimes,
I can hear
ancient singing.

THE TOY

Lake Sippo…was neutral ground where Indians would meet yearly to exchange prisoners.

The Perry High School Yearbook, the Clock, 1964

(There is little evidence of this ever happening.)

In one dream,
I found on the trail
a clay buzzer.

It belonged to a boy
brought here for
a prisoner exchange.

When he learned he now
belonged to a new tribe,
it fell from his hand,

and escaping from his lungs
was the sad sound
of the sighing wind.

A buzzer is a disk two to four inches in diameter with a strand twenty inches long doubled over and threaded through the two holes in the disk to be twirled. When properly spinning, a buzzer makes a sound similar to the sound of the wind sighing.

NIGHTLY RITUAL

In the trees

east of where I live,
one can hear crows
preparing for evening.

It’s a loud ordeal—
a warning of sorts,
or possibly
songs of reassurance.

As I enter their woods
voices cease;
only the flapping of wings
as they shuttle
from one branch to another…

In time,
I grow tired
of their nightly ritual
and move farther
along the path.

Lifting up and above
one of several paths
hidden behind dense foliage—
the excited chatter of children
on a group field trip.

Distance makes what they
are saying as unintelligible
as the loud squawking of geese
flying—*en masse*—overhead.

As sudden as their talking
started, it stops. It's easy
to imagine an exasperated
group leader trying to regain
control of a half-dozen
crazed cub scouts.

The color gray is what I think of
when November comes to mind,

that never-ending layer of gray
clouds and plants naked of leaves.

Don’t bother with color film,
black and white will work just fine,

is what I tell our guests who plan
on taking photographs of the park.

MID-WINTER ICE STORM

The sound of my steps
punching through crusted snow
scatters birds with the force
of small explosions.

And while I pose no threat,
they are reluctant to return
until I am safely gone
and lost from their memory.

12 MONTHS IN AND ROUND SIPPO LAKE

I / January

Along the bank, a rim of ice forms
at night only to melt under the sun.

This freezing and melting pattern
continues until we can’t recall

the lake not being frozen over.
With a sigh of reluctance, snow falls.

The wind gives breath and form to white
swirling ghosts that whimsically dance

across the ice floor from west
to east and straight into oblivion.

II / February

This falling snow suffers
from multiple personalities.

Sometimes it is a fast moving
current of white water.

Sometimes it is a confused
swarm of gnats or mosquitoes.

Other times, it resembles a sky-full
of near-still hot air balloons.

When I reach out my hand
it avoids me as if I were the

third rail powering an electric train.

A third rail is an extra rail used in some electric railways, instead of an overhead wire, for supplying power. It carries electricity at 750 volts, enough to cause very serious injuries.

III / March

While walking over to the lake
after looking at the hawks and owls,

Brian says, *A week and three days*
without a bit of snowfall

is a good indication that spring
is just around the corner.

I let his prediction go unanswered
knowing that winter is far from over,

but as we come across several robins,
he seems pleased by my continued
silence.

IV / April

After a week of steady rain,
only a fool would be out here

hiking around on these trails which
feel more like damp sponges,

meaning my shoes will be caked
with mud by the time I return home.

Yet, here I am, welcoming back
my old friend, the warm spring air,

whose sudden appearance resembles
a door joyously swung open.

V / May

Poet T. S. Eliot famously wrote,
April is the cruelest month of all.

While I am not inclined
to agree with his assessment,

I am prepared to say,
May is the grandest month of all.

Plants are returning to glorious forms,
birds—native and migratory—dart

from here to there, and the sun
is wonderfully warm upon the face.

VI / June

Another night and early morning
of down pouring rain.

The back yard is partially under
pools of standing water.

On higher, safer ground, two
young rabbits casually feed.

When their bodies are engulfed
by the tall unmowed grass—

with only their heads visible—
it gives the illusion of ducks

swimming in a sea of green.

VII / July

One afternoon while riding my
bike on the park’s trails,

I found myself engulfed by tall grasses
that nearly clogged my intended route.

Thicker and thicker the grasses grew
until they opened up onto a rice paddy.

A long row of women and girls,
wearing Asian bamboo sun hats,

paused only momentarily from
their labor to watch me pass.

VIII / August

This 200 acres of park will never know
a harvest of melons or sweet corn;

it will never be a place folks come to
gather vegetables or pick strawberries;

and this land will never hold
a stand of fruit trees.

Only wild, untamed plant life
will inhabit this place where

water takes refuge when clouds
release excess ballast from the sky.

IX / September
(Sept. 11-14, 2001)

As long as I live here, September
will be occupied with this thought:

one would have to go back nearly
one hundred years to hear not one

airplane or helicopter in the sky.
For three days, Jill and I listened

and heard only leaves rustling
in the surrounding trees, joined only

by the varied calls of birds as they
traveled their own designated flight
paths.

Sippo Park lies beneath a final approach path to the Akron-Canton Airport, as well as, beneath a common flight path of the Aultman Hospital helicopter.

X / October

And what is there not to cherish
about the month of October?

The countryside transforms
into a polychromatic display;

there is the continuous shower of leaves
which show great aptitude in riding the
wind;

and there’s a full moon that holds enough
legends to make a grown witch envious.

If I had my way, I’d have
a season-worth of October.

XI / November

The dark lump of fur that crosses
over from the park’s thick growth

into our still-green backyard,
is one very large groundhog.

Snow mixed with rain is telling
it the time for hibernation is

fast approaching; thus only
the unrelenting steel-cold screams

of a jay can cause it to pause and
look up from its ravenous task.

The italicized from Thoreau’s Journal, February 12, 1854

XII / December

Tall blond-colored grasses that con-
gregate along Perception Trail

click and clatter in response
to biting December winds.

Gone is the silky smooth
dancing and swaying of summer.

And even with my heaviest coat,
I, too, cannot escape these winds

which goes a long way in
intensifying my pity for them.

SHORT NATURE POEMS

CLOUDS

White cirrus clouds
lace the morning blue
high above our heads
for everyone to
dumbfoundedly
gaze up at

LEAVES

Leaves tumble down
mountains of air and
pile up into
their own mountains
for air to tumble through

Snow
beneath my feet
squeaks

Second week of rain:
this once snow-covered path
now mud slick as ice

Misty silence
with not one bird
riding the breeze

Sunlight
reflects brightly
between clouds:
a full moon

Leisurely
ants struggle
with a dragonfly wing

This humid morning—
all my energy spent
watching ants

Oh tiny gnat,
your heart pounds
just like mine

Millions of needles
in a dark blue pincushion.
Oh, this moonless night

Summer storm:
with each flash of lightning
a loss of breath

Overnight
the colors of autumn
have drained from the land

Out of the corner
of my eye
I see the star
I cannot see

Because of the way our eyes are constructed, it's difficult to see faint objects in the central field of vision. Averted vision lets you study the faintest possible detail using your peripheral vision; you can see fainter detail if you don't look directly at the object.

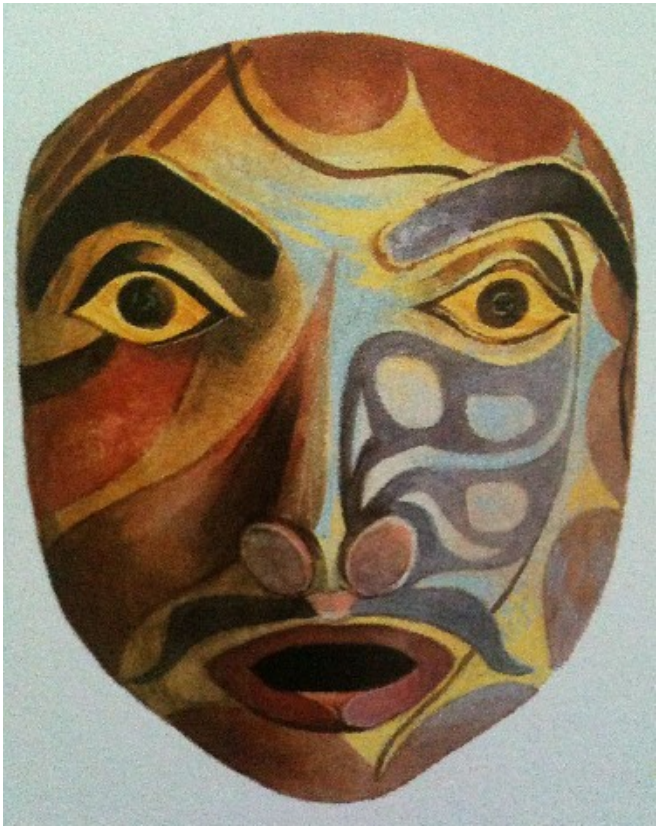
The Sky Tonight

Such a lovely spring afternoon
this 21st day of November

Late night snow
gone green by noon.
Winter is over

Moving across the field
like a herd of slow sheep,
patches of morning fog

A long black streamer
lifts and falls
across the sky—
spring migration



The Clarity of Clouds

What is more appealing than an azure sky if not the docile clarity of a cloud?

Francis Ponge
A French poet

The fog is rising.

Emily Dickinson’s last words

During my son’s eighth grade year, one enthusiastic parent thought it would be a keen idea for his small private school to have a baseball team. To field the team, all the seventh and eighth grade boys were recruited. Of course, Brian was excited by the pros-pect, despite never having played ANY organized sport.

The team members, by and large, understood their positions, but struggled with what to do with the ball if not caught for an out. And on the day of their first game, it rained, and it rained every game thereafter. After the first few games, I discovered the only way to endure the season was to pick out shapes and pictures in the clouds as they drift by.

Then around the fifth game, the clouds began to take on individual personalities. From a poetic perspective, this was a godsend which resulted in this *The Clarity of Clouds* collection of prose poetry. The prose poem, instead of having lines as verse poetry, is written in paragraphs. Consequently, it does not rhyme and seldom has meter.

Prose poems can be descriptions, anecdotal stories, the subjective exploration of objects or images, and yes, the personification of clouds.

For more about the prose poem, see the essay on page 249.

CLOUD SEEDING

During the last half of the twentieth century, cloud seeding became all the rage. From airplanes, seeds of different farm crops were dropped into large billowing clouds, creating healthy, well-watered banks of agricultural crops in the sky.

Peas, corn, alfalfa, hay, soybeans all grew in abundance and floated across the sky like helium floats in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Assessing the economic potential they had been handed, clouds soon cornered the market on agricultural exports from North America.

This, of course, led Midwestern farmers to launch their long, but unsuccessful lobbying of Congress to have cloud seeding declared an environmental safety hazard.

TEARS

Great-Great Grandmother belonged to an Indian tribe out West. It is said that when she was sad, she would wipe her tears away with nearby clouds. When the clouds were tear-filled, she would release them to carry her tears to Midwest farms in the form of mild, summer rains.

When Great-Great Grandmother had angry tears, caused by her drunken husband or foolish children, the clouds that were filled with these tears sometimes spawned tornadoes.

Great-Great Grandmother regretted the death and destruction caused by her anger, but knew it was not her place to break the cycle.

CLOUDS

One spring afternoon a father and his son venture outside to enjoy cloud formations.

After a few minutes, the son says, *Look, Dad, two fingers touching*. When they look around, they are sitting on ceiling high scaffolding in the Sistine Chapel.

After a few minutes, the son says, *Look, Dad, that cloud looks like an igloo* and discovers they are members of a clan of Asians crossing the Bering Strait.

After a few minutes, the boy says, *That cloud looks like the face of a Neanderthal,* and they find themselves sitting around a circle of stones watching a hairy man rub two sticks together.

Before his son has a chance to look up again, the father says, *How about if we go inside; I'd hate to meet up with any dinosaurs.*

CLOUDSVILLE

In the Cloudsville Public Library, you will discover that the shelves contain books pertain-ning only to clouds: the psychology of clouds, the philosophy of clouds, clouds and religion, the statistics of clouds, the economics of clouds, the social welfare of clouds, the education of clouds, the language of clouds, the mathematics of clouds, the physics of clouds, clouds and the medical sciences, clouds and agriculture, clouds in architecture, clouds in paintings, photography and clouds, clouds in films, clouds in literature, and the history of clouds. And even in the glass bookcase behind the head librarian’s desk, you will find a reserved collection entitled *The Secret Life of Clouds.*

TOP HAT CLOUDS

Near the end of the Top Hat Era of the nineteenth century, men rejected the traditional silk and beaver felt top hats for hats made from clouds. Unlike the static-shaped traditional top hats, cloud top hats were dynamic—their appear-ance always changing. Men of the arts preferred the wispy, feather-like style of the Cirrus Top Hat; middle class men preferred the Altocumulus Top Hat which appeared layered with a wavy demeanor, but the powerful businessmen preferred the Cu-mulus Top Hat with its noticeable vertical devel-opment appearing as a rising tower or skyscraper. A few oddballs in each city preferred the Funnel Cloud Top Hat, but they were seldom invited to social gatherings.

SIGN

After extensive research, it has been deter-mined that the bank of billowing, feather-like clouds moving around the Midwest is comprised of evaporated chickens.

At first, it was thought to be a gathering of angels; then maybe a huddle of cherubs trying to keep warm.

The church has yet to release an official statement. They seem to be in some disagreement as to how this heavenly sign should be interpreted.

BOXCAR CLOUDS

During the years of the Dust Bowl, when a cloud couldn’t be found for miles, - hell, for states, all the ranchers and cowboys boarded a one hundred boxcar train and headed east.

There they rounded up all the rain clouds the East had to offer and jam-packed them into the empty boxcars and returned West.

Once released, the thinking went, the broiling soil would cause the rain clouds to suddenly rise and release more than abundant moisture.

For as long as the trip took, the clouds held up pretty well. But when the doors to the boxcars were opened, the clouds refused to leave their new home and the Dust Bowl continued.

SCAB CLOUDS

The sheep of sleep have gone on strike. Oh, for the usual things: back pay, better feed, longer vacations. Parents are in a state of panic—they can’t get their kids to sleep before midnight. To resolve the crisis, the National Parents’ Association has begun to hire strike breaking clouds which double as sheep jumping over white picket fences. While this seems to have pacified the children, negotiations appear to be in the doldrums.

BASEBALL

A boy, who is out playing baseball with his friends, smashes a high fly that disappears in the clouds.

Wanting to play some more ball, he climbs up into the cloud and begins his search.

All he finds is an arrow whose paint marks says that it belonged to an Indian named Crouching Bull.

Returning to Earth, he learns Crouching Bull has been dead over two-and-a-half centuries.

Grateful for having the arrow returned, members of Crouching Bull’s family join in the search for the ball. Once found, they even hang around to watch a few innings.

THE CLOUD FAMILY

The social worker briefly glanced through the folder labeled, “The Cloud family.” A mother, father, and two children, one boy, one girl.

When the social worker walked into the con-ference room, she found, well, four clouds. She had never treated clouds before.

Not knowing where to begin, she asked, “Now, what seems to be the problem?” *It’s our son, Nadir, he’s always running off with those Tornado boys and tearing things up.*

“Well, what do you think led to this beha-vior?” *I’m afraid we’ve always been a bit lax, not just with Nadir, but also with our daughter Aurora.* “I see. Continue.”

It all started when we lived out West and let Nadir play with the Chinook boys. By the time we got to Iowa, he was running with those Tornadoes.

“And when you tried keeping Nadir home, what happened?” *He’d throw a tantrum—hurl things around, run out of the house.*

“Mrs. Cloud, how would you describe your family?” *Oh, I feel like a bunch of gypsies. My husband here just lays around all day; our son is out destroying or stealing things, and our daughter, well, she’s got one stormy personality*.

“Right.”

RAIN CLOUD

The old rain cloud has seen his share of wars: Burgoyne’s failed march, the nine month siege of Vicksburg, the awful years in Korea and Vietnam.

His family looks after him now and doesn’t mind if he sleeps all afternoon under the big willow tree.

On really hot days, his granddaughters take him tall, cool glasses of sweet tea.

IGOR CLOUD

Igor Cloud was schooled in classical music and is quite an accomplished harpist. Today, he no longer plays the harp because he is serving time in the Cloud Correctional Institution. Igor was con-victed for disrupting outdoor country music fes-tivals with deadly rain and hail. Secretly, he has broad support from the cloud community, but the head cloud magistrate is lead singer for *the Clouds-in-the-Sky* country music group.

TENNIS BALL CLOUD

It’s another game of tennis. Well, not a game exactly—more a game of volleying the ball back and forth. We’re not very good and spend a good bit of time chasing balls. After about 30 minutes, we’ve managed to hit all three balls over the fence. Nei-ther one of us feels much like getting them so Brian says, “Why don’t we use those low-flying clouds?” It’s a thought that’s never crossed my mind before, but what the heck, so I grab one. It’s like hitting a cross between a beach ball and a balloon, and because it doesn’t move quite as fast as a tennis ball, our game improves considerably. Our volley is now one long volley that continues well past sunset. At the point we can no longer see, we stuff the cloud into the can and head home. We leave our three lost balls for someone else to find.

EQUATION

Today, clouds are as scarce as straight guys in a gay bar. And yes, the sky is blue, but not like the blue skies out West which are a Boy Scout uniform blue—the type of uniform gay kids aren't allowed to wear.

I guess then the overall equation is about the same: there are no gay kids in blue Boy Scout uniforms and there are no clouds in this poem.

CIRCUS CLOUD

Most of the time people are content with passing their hand through me. Some like to take a karate chop to see me momentarily divided in half. Little girls, I like best—their tiny hands reach so tentatively for the smallest whiff. Teenage boys are the worst with their spitting. If it were only gum, I wouldn't mind, but the tobacco spit repul-ses me. I prefer Northern states to Southern—that Southern humidity wreaks havoc on my sinuses. It's not the most romantic job, but considering where most clouds end up, it's pretty tolerable.

ADOLESCENT CLOUDS

Agony for adolescent clouds is to be stalled for days or weeks on end with no wind.

When the boredom becomes unbearable, especially over the Bible Belt or Eastern Europe, they like to get together and form the faces of religious leaders such as Christ, Mary, the Pope. Mother Teresa is a hit these days.

At night, they roll in laughter at the number of people they attract and wonder how long they can keep egging people on without getting into trouble.

When over Texas, they prefer to do Madalyn Murray O'Hair. It was so good once back during the 1970s, that they even got Phyllis Schlafly out to take a look.

THE SHEEP AND THE CLOUD

One day a sheep grazed too close to a barbed-wire fence which took the opportunity to take a piece of wool from the sheep.

The sheep, knowing what kind of fashion statement this missing patch of wool would make on the other sheep, devised a plan.

Waiting for the biggest, fluffiest cloud to float by, the sheep, in its best pathetic voice said, “Oh, kind cloud, would you please wipe the tears from my eyes caused by that wool-snatching fence?”

The cloud, in the classic style of Neville Chamberlain, soon discovered it had been tricked and was now permanently affixed to the sheep’s bare spot.

Not fully grasping its predicament, the cloud asked, “But who will now dry *my* tears?”

YOUNG CLAYTON CLOUD

Young Clayton Cloud was BORED out of his mind making the usual cloud formations: faces, animals, monuments, flowers, zodiac signs, mythological gods.

If he had to “make” something, he wanted it to be art, and modern art at that.

Clayton wanted to *be* Claes Oldenburg, or Henry Moore, or Robert Holmes. And if a flower, then an O’Keeffe flower; if a face, then a Cezanne face.

At the very least, he would be a Jim Dine robe.

All of the art mentioned is copyright-protected but can be found on the internet.

FIDEL CASTRO CLOUD

Despite Mafia hit men, military invasions, assassination attempts, radio and air dropped propaganda, poisoned cigars, infected wet suits, a cloud in the shape of Fidel Castro keeps appearing off the Florida coast about an hour after sunrise.

Unlike his remarkable imitation of a piece of Limburger cheese during the Anita Hill witch hunt, Ted Kennedy keeps insisting, “This cloud in the shape of Fidel Castro cannot continue to appear over US waters.”

Having less than a high opinion of the “Chappaquiddick Kid,” the CIA is being characteristically smug about the whole thing.

CLOUD TERRORIST

For all the crap we daily pump into the at-mosphere, civilization is faced with yet another terrorist: the cloud terrorist.

Looking very innocent with a calm ap-pearance, it descends and engulfs the upper floors of skyscrapers.

Once most of a building is nothing more than a bank of white, the cloud terrorist floats away with the upper floors snuggly concealed within its white mass.

Reports of widespread arrests of suspected clouds are beginning to emerge, but government officials refuse to confirm anything.

OCTOBER CLOUD

The weather was harsh, which meant Lake Erie was treacherous. The soccer and field hockey fields I drove past on my way to college were covered by a cloud whiter than white and as thin as a communion host. My first thought? Snow. But it was early October, too early for snow this close to the lake. The cloud, the host, the vacillating puddle of white—as I neared the PE building—turned out to be a flock of seagulls taking refuge.

DREAM CLOUD

In my dream I am presenting this manu-script to a publisher. As the publisher begins leafing through the pages, I notice the pages are no longer made of paper but of clouds—every kind of cloud imaginable. “I’m sorry,” he says, “we just did a cloud book last year and it didn’t sell worth a damn.”

THINGS WE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CLOUDS

After Lila Zeiger

1. Have cloud stocks ever been considered to be included in the Dow Jones average?
2. Are clouds hermaphrodites?

3. Did Luke Howard (1772-1864), “The God father of Clouds,” love his wife as much as he loved clouds?
4. Did you ever notice how cooled barbecue briquettes look just like clouds?
5. Do clouds ever grow tired of following Eeyore around all day?
6. Do clouds earn royalties every time someone uses the Windows cloud wallpaper?
7. What ever happened to the clouds that posed for O’Keeffe’s *Above the Clouds* series?
8. Was that a cloud I heard singing, “I get no kicks from propane?”
9. Where do clouds bury their dead?
10. Does “You make me wet” mean the same to clouds as it does to beautiful women?
11. Do clouds resent being pushed around?
12. Do clouds have lucky numbers?
13. Do clouds accept contrails as distant cousins?

Howard, Luke (1772–1864) An English meteorologist who was the first person to devise a successful classification system for clouds, which he published in 1803 as a paper, ‘On the Modifications of Clouds’.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) was an American artist who painted nature in a way that showed how it made her feel.

Seeds of Change

SEEDS OF CHANGE

Seeds [of Change] is used to illustrate the changes that resulted when plants, animals, diseases, and people were exchanged between the Old and New Worlds as a result of Columbus's voyages of discovery. Scholars working on the Smithsonian's Seeds of Change project selected five seeds: disease, corn, sugar, potato, and the horse.

I listen to the splash of the Atlantic and Pacific and see Columbus land once more, over and over again.
—Joy Harjo

PART ONE

While Paleo-Indians tracked
large migrating beasts
across the frozen Bering Strait,
the harsh glacial environment
"cold filtered" from their germ pool
Old World "crowd diseases,"
creating for ten thousand years,
a pestilence free world.

* * *

Having fed on nearly every
available human host in Europe,
the smallpox virus—
to ensure its propagation—
struck an unlikely alliance
with the previously uninfected
lower nobility of Castile,
and with a vengeance,

reintroduced itself to
the New World Natives.

* * *

Rolling on ahead of the conquistadors,
across the Antilles, to Cuba, to Mexico—
passing from one Indian to another—
the pox prowled the breadth of both
continents,
leaving in its wake bodies inflamed with
pustule
sores,
shaken beliefs in gods, broken lines of
succession,
and after the arrival of the conquistadors,
ninety percent of the native population
decimated.

Corn

A. *Native Corn Song*

Before the sickness came,
  before the Spaniards,
  we made proper offerings to the God of Maize.

When the first green shoots appeared,
  we went to the fields,
  gathered some young ears and reeds,
  covered them with our blood
  and displayed them on our doors.

Once the maize was ripe,
  the women
  –with naked breasts and hair thrown loose—
  swayed and twirled in spiritual rapture.

As soon as harvest time arrived,
  the female chosen to represent
  the mature maize was beheaded.
  Her flesh was wrapped around the Maize Priest
  who danced all night at the temple.

The God of Maize saw our reverence then;

He sees our dilemma now.
We thank you, God of Maize,
for your continued gifts.

B.

Raised by the Caribbean natives
and shipped back to Spain by Columbus,
carried to the Gold Coast by Portuguese
sailors on their way to the Spice Islands,
corn found a new and hospitable
environment similar to that
of its American homeland.

Astonished by its high yields
and abundance of calories,
the African people readily put aside
their sorghum and millet,
and for this, the God of Maize was
happy and the African population grew.

Sugar

With shoots of sugarcane on board
the ships of his second voyage,
Columbus had guessed right
that the subtropical climate and
Caribbean soil would support
a thriving sugarcane industry.

What no one could have predicted,
though, was that the Indian population
the Spanish had planned on using
to work their plantations would
be dropping dead from diseases.
So where could a large,
steady supply of slave labor be found?

In Africa, where the population
Was thriving on corn.

PART TWO

Potato

Because they were Catholics
in a kingdom struggling with
questions of religious tolerance,
had helped King James II
in his failed attempt at
reclaiming the British throne,
and was feared they would form
alliances with surrounding Catholic
nations,

Irish Catholics were uprooted
and driven to the barren,
rain soaked province of Connacht, *
where grain would not ripen,
and pastureland was too
inadequate to support livestock.
Through a war of starvation,
Protestant England hoped it
would be forever free of Irish Catholics.

But Connacht was where Basque
fisherman stopped to dry
their North Atlantic catch,
and stowed on board their ships
was a hardy tuber recently
brought from the New World—
a plant which thrived in cool
climates and proved to be
a rich source of nutrition.

Quickly learning to grow the new plant,
the Irish population jumped
600 percent in eighty years,
but their reliance on the potato was total.
Disaster struck in 1854 when a fungus,
arriving from America, caused
their plants to blacken and wither.

A million people died from starvation
or the diseases caused by starvation;
a million more boarded ships
and sailed to the land from where
the potato came, but most
stayed to tough it out, and
in the end Irish Catholicism survived.

*Connacht is one of the five ancient provinces of Ireland, lying in the western and northwestern areas of the island.

Horse Song

listen brothers to the song of my vision quest
watch warrior brothers the dance of my vision quest

a spirit-helper has revealed itself to me
my spirit-helper appeared as a painted ghost
my spirit-helper is the fleeting horse-spirit

listen brothers to the song of my vision quest
watch warrior brothers the dance of my vision quest

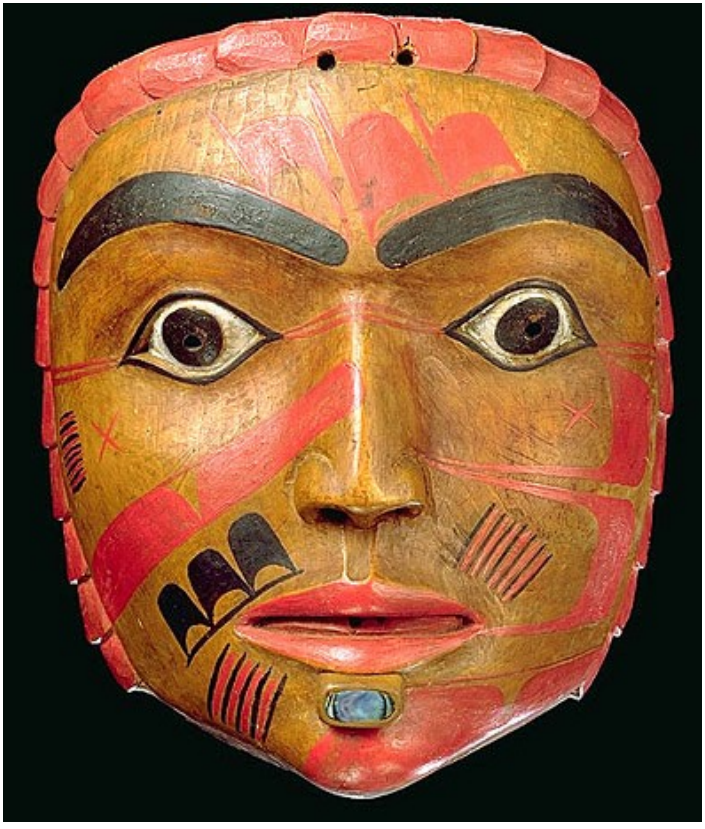
horse-spirit said it flew across the great water

horse-spirit said it escaped from the white warrior
horse-spirit said it missed the rich prairie grasses

listen brothers to the song of my vision quest
watch warrior brothers the dance of my vision quest

horse-spirit said it will help me steal fast horses
horse-spirit said it will guide me to buffalo
horse-spirit said it will protect me in battle

listen brothers to the song of my vision quest
watch warrior brothers the dance of my vision quest



Buffalo Neighbors

Buffalo Neighbors

Peculiar things about the Buffalo Neighbors poems.

Until I was in my thirties, everywhere I lived my neighbors were borderline crazy. And in two cases, certifiably so. The crazy neighbor situation began on Abbe Road in Elyria, Ohio and continued when we moved a mile or so to Bellfield Avenue. As one might expect, I lived with several oddballs while attending boarding school in Pennsylvania. The last odd couple lived above me in a large building in the town of Hartville.

Peace finally came when I moved to a nice home in Massillon, Ohio. On one side lived a sweet Italian couple and on the other was a Quaker Lady. But then it happened again. This time a wacko family moved *into my head* and stayed until I found a way of terminating their imagined existence.

THE WASH

Every Monday from my kitchen window, I watch
the old woman next door wash her eight children in the old-time wringer washing machine. Once her children are clean, she attaches them by their hands to a clothesline to dry in the breeze. The children seemed to think it was all big fun during the warmer months, but this winter weather causes them to stiffen like boards.

As twilight approaches, she unpins her stiffened children and stacks one on top of the other in a wheelbarrow. With great effort, the old woman wheels her stack of kids to a cellar door and lugs them inside as one would surfboards. This might explain her need for all that firewood.

LAWN CHAIR

The eight kids next door love storms, not just summertime, updraft storms, but cold front storms that spawn tornadoes. Storms with lightning so powerful the fillings in their teeth rattle. At the height of storms, the kids rip off their clothes, grab long metal objects, and dance around an aluminum lawn chair in which one of them sits stark naked.

Today, during a hellacious storm, a big ass bolt of lightning hit the kid sitting in the aluminum lawn chair—causing her to vanish in a thunderous flash of white. The surviving brothers and sisters began jumping around in a frenzy that would have put sharks to shame.

By the time camera crews arrived, the kids had settled down enough to tell their mother what had happened. Staring at the smoldering chair, the old hag told the reporter, "I've heard of things going up in smoke before, but this is ridiculous."

NESTS

Nests start appearing in our tree, two and three at a time, shortly after the last leaves of November fall. I never see them being placed there, though I am sure it's the work of the kids next door.

The previous owner of our house is dead, so I don't know how long this ritual has been going on. By late November, there will be over 100 empty bird nests in our tree.

On mornings when I notice a few more nests have been added during the night, I recall how Indians placed tokens on the ceremonial grave of Jeremiah Johnson for each Brave he killed. I try to figure out whether it's something I am doing to earn all of these twig and grass trophies.

A month from now, a strong Arctic wind will knock all the nests to the ground. As I clean up the mess, I'll see them watching from their windows. While it would be a neighborly act, I'll not wave to them. I fear they might not wave back.

SNOW ANGELS

Today has been declared a snow day and the kids next door are lying flat on their backs in a large circle. With their legs spread wide, they touch their feet together—right foot touching left, left foot touching right—making a star-shaped flower. On some undetectable signal, they start waving their arms—making snow angels. After a while, their flower transforms into a dandelion gone to seed. When a gust of wind kicks up, they float up and over the partially frozen pond. This goes on all afternoon: flower, angels, dandelion seeds, wind, flight. Only their mother—when she calls them in for dinner—can bring it to a stop.

MANNEQUINS

It was after the local department store closed that the stolen mannequins appeared at the edge of my neighbor's corn field. Each wore the uniform of an infamous military leader—Hitler, Tojo, Stalin, Mussolini, Franco—and stood in a knee high mound of manure. I asked Ford if the mannequins were a form of protest, or maybe a variation on "Cadillac Farm" in Texas.

"Nope. At night they come alive and parade around my field—Hup...two...three... four—scaring the b'Jesus out of the crows who live in the woods over there."

Ford...

"Hell, you'd think it was a tight-shoes Saturday night the way they march that goose step. Only thing keepin' 'em from world domination is all that manure."

M-a-n-u-r-e?

"Ain't nobody gonna listen to a bunch of guys with shit on their feet."

ED SULLIVAN

For several years, the folks next door have been collecting black and white TVs. They place one in every window of their two-story house. All the TVs are set to the same program that plays 24 hours a day. At night, a gray haze engulfs their house. During the day, the house is surrounded by dozens of mesmerized kids from throughout the neighborhood. Community leaders have hired a cult deprogrammer to rescue their sons and daughters, but even he enjoys the show.

FABLES

Stories and fables that contain animals, especially Aesop's Fables, keep disappearing from my son's *Treasury of Literature for Children*. My son knows that I have no answers for him, but each night he asks, "Dad, what happened to 'The Hare and the Tortoise,' what happened to 'The Kite, the Frog, and the Mouse,' what happened to 'The Dog in the Manger?'"

Time passes and more fables vanish: "The Wolf and the Crane," "The Leopard and the Fox," "The Old Hound." Then one night, while reading one of the few remaining fables, we hear a great commotion next door. Pulling back the curtain, we see my neighbor erecting a large sign that reads, AESOP'S ZOO, and scattered around his yard are white-washed pens containing all the missing animals.

APRIL

A week ago, Saturday, Ford drove up in a full-size moving truck and set his family to the task of loading the contents of their home. It was a thing of beauty. Not only because those crazy-ass people would forever be out of our lives, but because their act of loading seemed to be an orchestrated dance.

All day—without exploding into the dysfunctional family we have come to know—they carried boxes, beds, bikes, couches, chairs, dressers, lamps, TVs, tables, that old wringer washing machine to the truck. "And that's the family," asked my wife, "who considers fist fighting a form of bonding?"

Around supper time, Ford inched the loaded-down truck out of his drive and up the road. People throughout the allotment came out of their homes just to watch the truck disappear. For the first time in a half-generation, there was a feeling of calm returning to their lives.

But before we could reach our doors, we heard the truck returning. And when it came to a stop, the back of the truck flew open—releasing seven kids who started yelling, "April fools! April fools!"

BUFFALO TIME

The universe has reached the limit of its expansion and time is in a state of collapse. By noon, it's the 1870s and steam locomotives pull into town loaded down with buffalo hides. Believing that by morning we'll be experiencing the fourth Ice Age, the old man next door buys 500 hides and spends his early adulthood nailing them to his house.

PERSONA SEQUENCE

The persona who comes to visit has no invitation;
sleeps until noon and never makes the bed;
raids the refrigerator then drinks all the booze.
After four days it begins to smell of fish.

Psychoanalytical persona
parades around in the
shadows of the mind
draped in a black slip
quoting from
The Ego and the Id
by Sigmund Freud.

Hypochondriac persona
proudly wears its latest ailment

like a colored ribbon,
on a military uniform.

Orange persona gets pissed
at every college professor
who sends his freshmen off
to write stupid essays about
rotting oranges.

A Taoist persona
inhabits this house.

Just look around,
ten thousand things

all strewn about.

In the Taoist religion, 10,000 things refer to the multitude of daily distractions that cloud our minds and clutter our lives.

Glacier persona erodes
the human spirit by
gouging –
scraping –
and scouring its victims
until they are
little more than a heap
of terminal moraine.

Black hole persona grows fat
sucking the guilt of unspeakable
acts into its wide – swirling mouth.

Lettuce persona carries
the cries of dying Mexicans

in every head.

Stereotype persona
keeps saying
a Black or
a woman
can’t be
elected president
in America,

knowing that
a Black or
a woman
won’t be
elected president
in America,

as long as
it is allowed
to speak
its mind
in America.

NOTIONS OF PECULIAR INTENT

These poems are modeled after the Dada art form. "Dada was an art movement formed during the First World War in negative reaction to the horrors and folly of the war. The art, poetry, and performances produced by Dada artists were often satirical and nonsensical in nature" (www.tate.org.uk).

Second lives a life of seconds.

Second loses every race – every contest – every election by coming in second.

Second suffers from the middle child syndrome as a result of being born second.

Second always runs late and constantly hears himself say – *I'll be there in just a second.*

Second let his first wife slip away and is now married to his second.

Second always returns for seconds.

Second sometimes feels like sloppy seconds.

Second is always the one to yell out – I'll second that.

Second's curse continues in posterity with his second child being born on the second day of the second month of the second year of the new century…

Marching this year in the 2004 March of Dimes parade are ten floats.

Floats include:

the *Dime a Dozen* float with twelve cute little girls dressed up as dimes –

the *Can You Spare a Dime* float with 2 hobos –

the *Mercury Dime* float with the star athlete dressed as the winged messenger –

the *Dime Novel* float with the town librarian dressed as Laura Jean Libbey –

the *A Good Time for a Dime* float with Donald Duck –

the *Dime Bag* float with a Jerry Garcia look-
alike –

the *Roosevelt Dime* float with – of course – Roosevelt –

the *One Thin Dime* float with a rather anorexic teen –

the *Stop On a Dime* float with Wiley Coyote on the edge of a cliff –

and *The Dime Store* float with the town's pharmacist dressed as a Norman Rockwell character…

My father is ill.

Ill with a type of cancer caused by asbestos dust whose harmful effects do not surface for 20 to 30 years.

Years of life are limited because there are only expensive short-term chemo treatments.

Treatments of chemical lawn care my father also pays good money for.

For his investment, his lawn is green and lush.

Lush as it is, his lawn must be mowed
regularly, but he is too weak.

Weekly he calls and asks me to drive over
and mow his grass.

Grass gets cut and back it grows.

Grows too my father's cancer and more
orders are given for more chemo
treatments.

Treatments of chemicals now regulate my
father's life – and – mine…

Oil runs thick
with spent human blood.

Blood-barges transport
crude to U.S. refineries.

Refineries thin the oil like
coumadin thins thick blood.

Blood-oil flows from refineries
to pumps to our vehicles.

Vehicles guzzle the oil – the blood –
and spew spent souls from hot exhaust
pipes.

wounded and dead children of Iraq
encircle me –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
stretch for as far as the eye can see –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
reach all the way from this central
point of Iraq to its borders –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
cover the Middle East –
wounded and dead children of Iraq

cover the land hemisphere –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
cover the water hemisphere –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
cover the earth –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
fill my dreams and thoughts –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
fill the universe and fly
apart at the speed of light –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
are becoming new planets and stars –
wounded and dead children of Iraq
stretch for as far as the eye can see….

THUG

Second Persian Gulf War

I’m missing the war this time
because I’m not watching TV

I’m missing the war this time
because I’m not reading the paper

I’m missing the war this time
because I’m not listening to the radio

I’m missing the war this time
because I’m not surfing the net

I’m missing the war this time
not because ignorance is bliss

I’m missing the war this time
because arrogance has seized the Presidency

I’m missing the war this time
because Congress has abdicated its powers

I’m missing the war this time
because the U.S. has become a world thug

Hitler will not be serving Pepper Beef Steak with Garlic-Cilantro Butter ~ South Seas Curried Beef over Jasmine Rice ~ Greek-Style Beef & Cheese Ravioli ~ Mediterranean Beef Steak-and-Salad Pizza ~ Tuscan Beef & Pesto Pasta because Hitler is a vegetarian.

Hitler will not be serving Pork Medallions with Vegetables ~ Pork with Parsnips and Pears ~

Grilled Pork with Melon-Tomato Tumble ~ Pork Chop 'n' Potato Dinner ~ Mustard-Glazed Ribs because Hitler is a vegetarian.

Hitler will not be serving Herbed Chicken with Spinach Stuffing ~ Chicken with Mustard Relish ~ Catalan Chicken Chowder ~ Turkish Chicken Thighs ~ Chicken with Artichokes because Hitler is a vegetarian.

Hitler will not be serving Cold Roasted Salmon ~ Browned-Butter Skate ~ Pesce Italiano ~ Crab and Swiss Strata ~ Grilled Swordfish with Tomato Chutney because Hitler is a vegetarian.

Hitler will not be serving Rack of Venison with Forest Mushrooms ~ Pheasant with Mustard Sauce ~ Simply Elegant Bear Steak and Rice ~ Grouse Breasts with Ham Sauce ~ Smothered Muskrat and Onions because Hitler is a vegetarian…

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Republicans are Dead to Me

Delusional cult leaders create delusional followers.

Fran Ferder & John Heagle

Two months after President Joe Biden took office, I drove past a one-time friend’s house. When I saw he was flying a Trump flag, I was shocked and directed my ire into writing these poems.

#1

Those Trumpians cause me to sigh
Because they are all brainsick;
With no damn shame they freely lie.

Yes, I could punch one in the eye
Just like I would to any dumb hick.
Those Trumpians cause me to sigh.

Every damn one of them test my
Faith to the point they make me sick.
With no damn shame they freely lie.

I wonder how they can rely
And embrace such nonsense so quick…
Those Trumpians cause me to sigh.

With great comfort I can thereby
Declare them as ‘thick as a brick.’*
Those Trumpians cause me to sigh;
With no damn shame they freely lie.

#2

The fact is—there were no rigged elections.
Bill Barr stated there was no voter fraud.
Only screwballs make such dumb assumptions.

Even judges rejected superstitions
that the fall elections were marked with fraud.
The fact is—there were no rigged elections.

After the GCC's investigation,
They reported no evidence of fraud.
Only screwballs make such dumb assumptions.

National Election Coalition
Also found no electronic fraud.
The fact is—there were no rigged elections.

Therefore, the rational conclusion
Is that to believe in the Big Lie is odd.
The fact is—there were no rigged elections.
Only screwballs make such dumb assumptions.

#3

Why commit germ warfare on their own kind?
The precautions are so very simple.
This would cause poor Darwin to lose his mind.

It’s not very hard to ID their kind—
To those with masks, they were less than civil.
Why commit germ warfare on their own kind?

“I’m not hurting anyone” is a sign
They’re sadly a bunch of mental cripples;
This would cause poor Darwin to lose his mind.

High covid rates in Trump regions remind
Us their numbers will simply dwindle.
Why commit germ warfare on their own kind?

Social distancing also comes to mind
As a good way to avoid the simple.
Why commit germ warfare on their own kind?
This would cause poor Darwin to lose his mind.

#4

Oh QAnon. Oh QAnon,
Your followers are punch-drunk nuts.
As you know—they’re easy to pawn.

You are quite a phenomenon
With members acting like robots.
Oh QAnon. Oh QAnon.

Your “breadcrumbs” require lexicons,
For your meanings have no shortcuts.
And as you know—they’re stupid pawns.

Their hunt for pedophiles goes on
But they can’t find any hideouts.
Oh QAnon. Oh QAnon.

Now Elise* says she’ll carry on
Your grand plan like some mangy mutt.
Oh QAnon. Oh QAnon;
You sure can spot an easy pawn.

#5

They staged a damn insurrection—
That disgusting gang of traitors!
Worse, it was at Trump’s direction.

Fed on lies from politicians—
Even our own legislator —
They staged a damn insurrection.

Tales of a stolen election
Brought out a mass of rioters.
Worse, it was at Trump’s direction.

With bats & polls & collections
Of deadly accelerators,
They staged a damn insurrection—

Tourists? It was pure aggression!
Scum marched through the Senate chambers.
They staged a damn insurrection.
Worse, it was at Trump’s direction.

#6

The truth is everything Trump touches dies.*
Vodka, casinos, airlines, even steaks.
You have to admit he’s not very wise.

We should have known that when he turned his eyes
Toward politics the system would break.
The truth is everything Trump touches dies.

Hell, if asked, even I could have advised
Against joining sides with that rattlesnake.
Sadly, so many are not very wise.

And that act he’s a populist belies
The fact he views his base as fruitcakes.
They’ll soon learn everything Trump touches dies.

But that will not happen until he ties
Those lame-brain republicans to a stake.
You have to admit they’re not very wise.
The truth is everything Trump touches dies.

#7

The words Trump uses are absurd.
Stupid • Shady • Wacky • Weirdo.
His base swears they’re hearing songbirds.

And indeed, they are for his herd—
Nutty • Nasty • Dummy • Dumbo.
The words Trump uses are absurd.

A clown could make this choice of words—
Moonbeam • Moon face • Phony • Psycho.
His base swears they’re hearing songbirds.

And each is meant as a smear word—
Leakin’ • Loser • Wild Bill • Bozo.
The words Trump uses are absurd.

Of course, there are many you’ve heard,
But enough about this yobbo.*
The words Trump uses are absurd.
His base swears they’re hearing songbirds.

#8

Republicans are dead to me.
They believe everything Trump says.
They won’t open their eyes to see.

Their brains must be the size of peas
Because that man says some real gems.
Republicans are dead to me.

It’s sad to watch them take a knee,
Thinking Trump is some brilliant wiz.
They won’t open their eyes to see.

And then there is that spiteful glee
Which always brings me to tears.
Republicans are dead to me.

I’m so glad a few friends agree,
So I won’t live in misery.
Republicans are dead to me.

They won’t open their eyes to see.

#9

Show your friends you’re extremely wise
And admit climate change is real.
Don’t fall for another ‘Big Lie.’

Scientists have no reason to lie
Or conjure up some bogus spiel.
Show your friends you’re extremely wise.

It does matter if someone dies
From fumes of an automobile.
Don’t fall for another ‘Big Lie.’

Thank gawd solar is on the rise;
Compared to fossil fuels it’s ideal.
Show your friends you’re extremely wise.

Not to act is to jeopardize
All that we believe is ideal.

Don’t fall for another ‘Big Lie.’
Show your friends you’re extremely wise.

#10

There’s no hope for you—you’re part of the Cult
Of Trump and his deceptive mind control.
To my dying day I will call you out.

So you’re unhappy—but it’s your own fault
By deciding to remain a prole.*
There’s no hope for you—you’re part of the cult.

What really flipped you like a somersault
Was the day Obama won at the polls.
To my dying day I will call you out.

You’re now a neofascist who exalts
Regaining your perceived loss of control.
There’s no hope for you—you’re part of the cult.

Through your behavior you mount an assault

On our multiracial, national soul.
To my dying day I will call you out.
There’s no hope for you—you’re part of the cult.

#11

Those Trump flags say one thing: Traitors!
Like when they charged the Capitol
To anoint Trump their dictator.

Peaceful demonstrators
They were not—more like animals.
Those Trump flags say one thing: Traitors!

They were sure they were crusaders
Charging through a symbolic wall
To anoint Trump as dictator.

They assaulted police officers
In what was plainly a brawl.
Those Trump flags say one thing: Traitors!

Now I hear my legislator
Claim he never joined the cabal
To anoint Trump as dictator.
Those Trump flags say one thing: Traitors!

#12

I am appalled that your beliefs are based on hate
and unfounded conspiracy theories.
Trump knew all along you would take his bait.

Were those thoughts there all along just waiting till there were no liabilities.
I am appalled that your beliefs are based on hate.

I have to believe the feelings were great
When you could put on those MAGA parties.
Trump knew all along he would take his bait.

Drinking and smoking until it was late,

you talked up Trump’s man-made prophecies.
I am appalled that your beliefs are based on hate.

Over time you work yourself into a state
That when Trump lost you revealed your true species.
I am appalled that your beliefs are based on hate.
Trump knew all along you would take his bait.

#13

I believe the Amish are right,
As long as you hold MAGA views
I should keep you out of my sight.

Quite frankly it’s pointless to fight
Anyone who holds cultist views.
I believe the Amish are right.

You’re no patriot—you’re downright

Fascist with that hatred you spew.
I should keep you out of my sight.

The faith of the Amish is forthright—
But yours of Trump looks askew.
I believe the Amish are right.

You might think you’re so bloody bright
But you’ll be remembered as a shrew.*
I believe the Amish are right,
I should keep you out of my sight.

#14

Face it— You’re not pro-American.
Our source of pride you reject out of hand;
You throw our heritage in a trashcan.

You now “support and defend” Trump more than
The Constitution of our great land.
Face it— You’re not pro-American.

Now “law and order” Republicans,
After the riot, keep their heads in the sand.
You pitch our heritage in a trashcan.

The once “peaceful transfer of power” can
No longer be counted on with your brand.
Face it— You’re not pro-American.

Our “Sweet Land of Liberty’ has become an
Arena of carnage by your cruel hands.
Face it— You’re not pro-American.
You pitch our heritage in a trashcan.

#15

There is a chilling rise of fascism.
The GOP launched this full-scale war.
Their basis is one of fatalism

With a god ignorant of federalism,
And clearly rotten to the core.
There is a chilling rise of fascism.

Aren’t they creating a great schism
By bringing a false idol before God?
Their basis is one of fatalism

Engulfed in their Cult of Satanism.
To state plainly, they’re now Donald Trump’s whores.
There is a chilling rise of fascism.

Perhaps an old-fashioned exorcism
Is in order to terminate this fraud.
There is a chilling rise of fascism.
Their basis is one of fatalism.

#16

Trumpites are a bunch of Neo-luddites.*
Ned Ludd destroyed machines out of protest.
Trumpites engaged in a similar plight.

Trumpites were willing to put up a fight

Against robots who have no need for rest.
Trumpites are a bunch of Neo-luddites.

Strikes once showed the strength of their might,
but it did not take long for them to become
pests.
Their encounter was like Ned’s failed plight.

Thinking their employment was a birthright
led companies to look elsewhere to invest.
Trumpites are a bunch of Neo-luddites.

This left many with a feeling of blight
Who looked to a charlatan in zest.
Trumpites are a bunch of Neo-luddites.
Trumpites engaged in a similar plight.

#17

The ‘Right’* defiles the Second Amendment.
Everything they claim distorts the Founders.
They would never dare change the

Commandments.

It is true its** wording sounds ambivalent,
Yet, the Founders found it clear to their ears.
The “Right” defiles the Second Amendment.

That’s because militias were an element
of life to confront British Soldiers.
They would never dare change the
Commandments.

Then weapons were in short supply, which
meant
Each was to provide his own under orders.
The “Right” defiles the Second Amendment.

When the Army became the replacement,
The right to arms went to the government.
The ‘Right’ defiles the Second Amendment.
They would never dare change the
Commandments.

Trump followers are self-delusional
To a degree never before seen.
For such a modern world, it's just surreal.

The stuff they believe is juvenile—
Like how they'll drop dead from a vaccine.
Trump followers are self-delusional.

And every conversation turns, as usual,
To "Taking our guns" – which to me sounds pretty keen.
For such a modern world, it's just surreal.

How can they fall for a "disputable
Election?" –the proof can clearly be seen.
Trump followers are self-delusional.

Everything they believe I find despicable,
And I'm not sorry if you think I'm mean!
Trump followers are self-delusional.
For such a modern world, it's just surreal.

#19

Trumpites believe every damn thing he says—
Goofy shit like, I'm a stable genius.
Can't they step back and just observe what he does?

Nobody respects women more than me.
Nobody's better to people with disabilities than me.
Trumpites believe every damn thing he says.

Nobody knows more about nuclear weapons than me.
Nobody knows more about ISIS than me.
Can't they step back and just observe what he does?

Nobody knows more about technology than me.
Nobody knows more about renewables than me.
Trumpites believe every damn thing he says.

Nobody knows more about jobs than me.
Nobody builds walls better than me.
Can't they step back and just observe what he does?

Nobody is more conservative than me.
Nobody loves the Bible more than me.
Trumpites believe every damn thing he says.
Can't they step back and just observe what he does?

#20

Your degree of treason is off the scale.
What’s your goal? To shred the Constitution?
Why should we live with such betrayal?

How you fall for his obvious large-scale
Lies is beyond my comprehension.
Your degree of treason is off the scale.

I would arrest and throw your ass in jail,
Making sure bail would never be an option.
Your degree of treason is off the scale.

If in charge, I would do more to curtail
Your stab at another insurrection.
Why should we live with such betrayal?

Installing Trump may be your Holy Grail
But it’s an out-right act of sedition.
Your degree of treason is off the scale.
Why should we live with such betrayal?

#21
For five years I saw you as gullible—
Conned by a professional charlatan,
Then after the count you became trouble.

Shockingly you were unreasonable—
Moving way past just being partisan.
For five years I saw you as gullible.

You were no longer voting for an able
Candidate but an orange-faced harlequin.
Then after the count you became trouble.

And when he lost, you were first to enable
His ‘stolen election’ –causing a tailspin.
You, by this point, were more than gullible.

Your kind? Sociopaths, with such labels:
Tend to lie, break laws, do anything to win.
For five years I saw you as gullible—
You are nothing but a gang of trouble.

#22
The flag you fly is the new southern cross.
It takes its place next to the Stars & Bars.
It’s a display that Trump controls your thoughts.

Nobody sees you as some Betsy Ross,
But instead someone who is quite Vulgar.
That flag you fly is the new southern cross.

All of your ideas resemble dross*
And deserve to be thrown hither and far.
Your flag makes clear that Trump controls your thoughts.

Anti-Semitic slurs are embossed
There with hate and other ways to scar.
The flag you fly is the new southern cross.

While January 6 was a loss,
Your flag says you yearn for a Myanmar. **
The flag you fly is the new southern cross.
It’s a display that Trump controls your thoughts.

#23

Trump was not reelected president,
So you embraced the first conspiracy.
But there’s no reinstatement precedent.

Sixty judges stated it’s self-evident
Trump’s cronies have succumbed to tyranny.
Donald Trump is no longer president.

August twelfth is marked as the next big event,
But you know there’s no possibility—
There is no reinstatement precedent.

Then what? You’re clearly not hesitant
To make voting an impossibility.
Get it, Trump will never be president.

Despite the size of your heart-filled movement,
History will nix your credibility.
Trump was not reelected president,
And there’s no reinstatement precedent.

#24

How dare you aid and abet Trump’s
Assault on our democracy?
You really need a good brain dump*—

As in, what you were taught, then lumped
in your brain haphazardly.
Is this why you encourage Trump?

You come off like a country bump-
Kin—Autocrats are all ghastly.
You really need a good brain dump.

You’ll soon learn how high you can jump
When Trump demands all the booty.
Go ahead, aid and abet Trump—

ALL your rights will go in the dump,
And you’ll learn it’s no comedy.
How dare you aid and abet Trump?
You really need a good brain dump.

NOTES:
1. Reference to Jethro Tull’s Thick as A Brick.

4. Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY), elevation to a Republican Party leadership position

6. Everything Trump Touches Dies is the title of a book by Rick Wilson.

7. Yobbo: a cruel and brutal fellow
Synonyms: bully, hooligan, roughneck, rowdy, ruffian

10. In George Orwell's dystopian 1949 novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, the proles are the working class of Oceania. The word prole is a shortened variant of proletarian, which is a Marxist term for a working-class citizen.

13. Shrews have a foul odor caused by scent glands on the flanks as well as other parts of the body.

16. Luddites were British weavers and textile workers who objected to the increased use of mechanized looms and knitting frames. Neo-luddites are those who object to the new service-information age (i.e. manufacturing moving out of the U.S.).

17.* Republican Right, ** Second Amendment

22. *Dross: The scum or refuse matter which is thrown off, or falls from, metals in smelting the ore, or in the process of melting

**2021: Myanmar (Burma) coup d'état: On February 1, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint were arrested by the military of Myanmar. The military announced that power had been handed to Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The military announced on state-run TV that they would be in control of the country for one year.

24. The act of recalling old information about a subject or a concept like American government or citizenship.

Null Island Station

Quatrains are four-line stanzas of any type, rhyme, or meter. Quatrains, in America, tend to be unrhymed and use free verse. Reflective of American translator of Chinese poems, Red Pine, and Walt Whitman, many lines in a poem line come to a full stop. By doing this, each line presents a full thought on which to build the poem.

In tenth and eleventh century Persia, poets composed *Ruba'is*, or quatrains, to voice criticism of fanatically imposed prohibitions, doctrine, and religious fanaticism. At other times, poets used quatrains to express personal feeling, beliefs, and doubts. (Peter Avery, 1981.)

Some notes for this text.

Null Island is a fictional island in the Gulf of Guinea
located where the equator crosses the prime meridian, at coordinates "Null,Null" or 0°N 0°E.

The Tang Dynasty was the golden age of classical Chinese poetry, while the Sung was a high point of Chinese painting.

The four major religions of the Far East are Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. “The Tao” means, “The way of the universe.”

Two trains travel in opposite directions on the equator.
Two trains travel in opposite directions on the date line.
All will meet at the same moment at Null Island Station.
The collision will symbolize our nation’s state of affairs.

The Quatrain family lives four houses down.
They have four girls and four boys.
They have four cats and four dogs.
They have four cars and four trucks.

I was driving home in a heavy downpour.
A quatrain tried to cross in front of me.
I ran it over with both front and back tires.
I took it home, but it was way beyond revising.

The Chinese poet Lin Pu never married—
never sought an official career.
With his wife—the plum—he taught
their children—the cranes—how to dance.

If this were the Tang or Sung Dynasty,
and I was at the peak of my career,
I would paint my poems on walls,
on rocks, and on my neighbor’s damn fence.

Our new neighbors have erected
a five-foot stockade around their yard.
It reminds me of the Iron Curtain.
It reminds me of a chastity belt.

I write my poems on water.
I watch them flow downstream.
I always laugh when unsuspecting
fishermen get them tangled in their nets.

I am listening to a Symphony by Philip Glass.
I am listening to a Symphony by Philip Glass.
Glass is the composer of the symphony I am listening to.
I am listening to a Symphony by Philip Glass.

Philip Glass is an American composer and pianist. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential composers of the late 20th century. Glass's work has been associated with minimalism, being built up from repetitive phrases and shifting layers. Glass describes himself as a composer of "music with repetitive structures", which he has helped evolve stylistically.

My mother refuses to cross over.
She keeps showing up at holiday gatherings.
Not everyone realizes that she’s dead.
That’s why she steers clear of me.

Every day I read the obits and the classifieds.
What causes so many in their 50s to die?
Why are there so many burial plots for sale?
The mathematical possibilities simply don’t add up.

Cremate my body when I die.
Scatter my ashes on deserts and beaches
where I may rejoin the earth’s sand.
Require wine glassmakers to use that sand.

(After Omar Khayyam)

What an odd contradiction.
To pride oneself on striving
to earn a place in Heaven
while harboring such fears of death.

Heaven is no destination above.
Hell is no punishment below.
Heaven and hell are lived here and now—
each a reflection of our behavior and
kindness.

The Chinese are a practical people.

They embrace the Tao, the Buddha, and
Confucius.
I too am practical when need be
and cast aside the relentless wheel of rebirth.

To begin my path to selflessness
I am going to stay drunk many days
and gamble away all my wealth.
Only when I have nothing can I know the Tao.

(After poet Shams Maghrebi)

Every day for the last sixty years
the Buddhist monk spent mornings
raking water-smooth stones.
“This task frees me from the Self.”

Let me come back as the town oddball.
Let me go around talking to thin air.
Let me go around waving to phantom people.
Let me come back without a care in the world.

Yang Wan-Li wrote over 20,000 poems.
Today, nearly 4,000 still survive.
I can’t begin to imagine the time he spent
making all that needed ink and brushes.

(Poet Yang Wan-Li: 1124-1206)

As friends we build a bonfire.
Soon everyone is quietly staring.
Fire knows its seductive powers
and patiently awaits our arrival.

A bird flies through the open window.
I whack it with a killing blow.
After flailing a bit, it again takes to flight.
Everyone in the house is shocked silent.

Some unseen animal—a bird I guess—
is calling out: chup-chup-chup-chup.
In my youth I would have gone investigating.
Now I just sit, waiting for it to fly to me.

Frequently Brother Crow brings me news.
Sometimes the news is good, sometimes it’s bad.
Mostly I welcome his news whether good or bad,
except on Sunday mornings while reading the paper.

I am hiking down a deserted path.
In one hand I carry a rod and reel.
In my youth I always had such hopes.
These days, I don’t even care if I get a bite.

⊕

A girl is out sunning herself.
Her skin is covered with glass.
If I reach out and touch her
she will shatter into a million pieces.

A week of dry and crisp weather.
Leaves are beginning to curl and fall.
Unlike undecipherable tea leaves
I understand these leaves quite well.

It’s early October and 88 degrees,
with humidity as thick as smoke.
If this is Indian Summer, then
tribes must be on the warpath.

Perhaps it is all due to climate.
Perhaps it reflects the mood of the nation.
But fall foliage lacks color this year—

going from green, to yellow, to brown.

The thought of it—being trapped
for two days beneath a dead man…
Considering all the cold weather exposure,
a photo in the local paper seems so minimal.

(Akron Beacon Journal, 1988.)

Could this be the result of the full moon?
A man asleep along the side of the road.

Another walking with a backpack and a jug of water.
I can only imagine how my students will behave.

The sign on the corner was quite clear:
Post No Signs. Which goes to explain
why we are so amused when we see that
someone has planted over 50 NO! signs.

An old taildragger is flying around in circles.
Its engine reminds me of old WWI movies.
Several years ago all planes were grounded.
That’s how the sky must have sounded before The War.

In response to 9/11/2001

Jeanie Marie likes the men
her father brings home for her.
Sometimes she laughs right out loud
when they rub between her legs.

At long last I have embraced Darwinism
knowing that our love will evolve into
a state of such perfection that we will be
the subject of all the scientific journals.

When I hear your voice, I am pleased.
When I touch your face, I am pleased.
When I kiss your lips, I am pleased.
When I hold you close, I am pleased.

Unlike the prophecies of Nostradamus,
my quatrains offer no predictions.
Instead, I write about what I live
and see, with some personal opinions.

Trump says absentee voting is rigged.
Trump says early voting is rigged.
Trump now claims voting in person is rigged.
Trump lies to ensure all voting is rigged.

Frost got the large apple tree this year.
There are no apples covering the ground.
Deer that grew up here look up and stare.
On November 3* we too will look up—but in prayer.

If they would rather die
by ignoring social distancing,
they had better do it, and
decrease the surplus population.

* The 2020 presidential election.

The Day I threw An Eighth Grade Student Out My 2nd Story Classroom Window

THE DAY I THREW AN EIGHTH GRADE STUDENT OUT MY SECOND STORY CLASSROOM WINDOW

I was lecturing about William Penn and the Quakers when I looked over and saw Robert making a paper airplane. I walked over to his desk, took the partially created plane, and threw it into the trash.

“I don’t care if you choose not to take notes, but you’re not going to make paper airplanes.”

Robert then reached down, pulled out another sheet of paper from his three-ring binder, and began folding. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“I want to better understand the aerodynamics of flight.”

The dialog in this poem is almost word for word.

PROOF

On this last day of school,
I am stuck proctoring
a math exam with a room full
of eighth graders ready to bolt
like a pack of greyhounds,

and all I can think about
is taking the canoe out
to embrace what appears
to be proof that summer is here.

Yet, I know I would feel
a void minus your presence.

PARAGRAPHS

I am mid-way through
grading the fourth long essay
written this year
by my 8th grade students.

As always, the writing
is surprisingly good,
but I notice a lack of paragraphs
when there is a shift
from one topic to the next.

My assumption is that
students are hoarding
paragraphs for future use
on graduation exams,
or for jobs where
employers might value
educated workers.

Regardless of the reasons,
there is an absence of
paragraphs in the essays
my students have written,
and it’s beginning to
grate on my nerves.

DELIVERY

On thinking about Brian’s delivery

Piled five feet in front of me,
our annual order of firewood.
Until dusk, when too dark to see,
I will shuttle load after load
of wood down the hill and stack into
neatly packed, self-standing rows.
Over the winter, the long rows of wood
will slowly dwindle and reveal once
again rectangular patches of dirt.

When thinking of you, the reverse is true:
Instead of shrinking, your womb will slowly
grow larger and larger until one day
the child suddenly arrives.

FUR

I am at the zoo with my son
a few minutes past closing time.

We linger long enough to see
one of the tigers wander into a
small tunnel and remove its fur—
revealing an attractive girl in her mid-20s.

Dad, that tiger is fake!

“Son, adults play various roles in life.
Some are just better than others.”

1997 PINEWOOD DERBY:
BOY SCOUT PACK 265

Brian used the provided pinewood block
to build his car, but the dangling roots
became entwined around the wheels.

Another boy used a Hershey's chocolate bar,
but it melted under the heat of the lights.

A third boy used a wedge of Swiss cheese,
but it wasn't very aerodynamic.

One boy named Mozart used ivory piano keys,
but it was as slow as weeping elephants.

The scout named "Johnny with Swift Feet"
  built his car from the wind
    and received the biggest trophy.

THE HURT

My mother had the good sense
never to say it—
“This is going to hurt me more
then it’s going to hurt you.”
I never would have believed her,
nor should my son believe me
as I walk him to his room
for a needed “time-out.”

Instead,
I leave him alone
to his own silent thoughts
and wait for him to emerge—
half gulping / half chanting—
“I’m sorry, I’m okay now.”
And the hug at the end of the ordeal—
 a sign of forgiveness; a way to say,
 “God, this hurts.”

CAIRN

Cairn: a mound of stones erected as a memorial or marker.

Each time we go for a walk in the field out behind our house, I add more rocks to the pile I started last summer. Politely, Brian stands to one side and watches—seldom asking any more what it is I am building. "Oh, just a pile of rocks," is what I say when he does ask, knowing he is too young to understand that rocks preserve memories.

Although the pile has grown in size, I can still identify events: Brian's birth, his baptism, that first step, that first sentence, the week in the hospital, learning to ride a bike, starting school, trips to Williamsburg.

When the pile grows too large, I will move down the trail and start a second, and continue to build until the next generation—Brian's children—can use my cairns to follow our path, to see his past.

BERMUDA: 1994

A Bermuda High has socked in the Midwest and this combination of heat, humidity, and lingering stench of cat urine, reminds me of old sweat socks left too long in a gym locker.

The husband and wife team across the street—wearing Bermuda shorts and white, knee-high socks—take turns mowing their brown lawn. Long thin lines, left by the wheels of their mower, record their progress.

From my side of the asphalt sea, I try to concentrate on their diligence, but my thoughts drift and I am lost like a schooner sailing through the Triangle.

GIOTTO

A transparent image
of a bell with wings—

effortlessly soaring at
a forty-five-degree angle—

hovers above my son who
is sitting on the couch

eating green grapes
from an orange bowl.

I try to imagine
how Giotto would

paint such a scene in
his primary pastels

with all lines leading to
a thematic focal point.

But what would be the
thematic focal point?

The child? The grapes? No,
the transparent image

of the bird crashing through
a transparent piece of sand

to a higher / saintlier world.

SPRINGER

Secure in a ten-gallon fish aquarium from our two cats, lives Brian's pet gerbil. We call him Springer—named after the science teacher who prodded me into bringing the damn thing home at the end of the school year.

Springer feels at home in his ten-gallon world. How do I know? Because he makes this little thumping noise with his hind feet: marking his territory, the instruction booklet says. Thus, to mark is to love.

On the days we clean his glass world, we let him vacation around the kitchen in a clear-blue plastic ball that he propels back and forth across the floor. To occupy his mind the rest of the time, Springer endlessly runs on a squeaky metal treadmill, burrows tunnels in wood shavings which collapse around him as he digs, eats and sleeps.

How little our two lives differ.

BLUR

Upon the birth of her first child, the woman with a successful business career embraced her new role of homemaker

after a few months home, she noticed that she could never remember what day of the week it was until she found and looked at her digital watch

after the birth of her second child, she was unable to keep track of the months of the year and had to be reminded by her husband to change the calendar

after the birth of her third child, seasons of the year began blurring together—broken only by sudden appearances of green, or brown, or white

then one day while writing a check for their new family van, she was no longer sure of the year or her age or how many years it had been since she left her successful business career

and there she sat, for hours—she guessed—wondering how many days, how many months, how many seasons, how many years had passed without her being aware of their passing…

WAY TOO DEEP

When I was younger
I went fishing a lot
but never caught
a damn thing, or
if I did, it was
only a twig or
hunk of moss.

This same sense
of failure is what
I feel today when we
get on the topic of
our friend's marriage—

so leave me camped
on shore because
her problems run
way too deep for my
collection of lures.

MAYFLY

As a boy, I spent summers at a camp located on a small lake in Indiana. Every year near the end of July, the camp was covered with mayflies. I admired how they clung to the sides of cabins with their fragile see-through wings and long, stringy tails.

On one nature hike, we learned how the adult mayfly has a non-working mouth and dies soon after mating. The oldest kid from my cabin leaned over and said, “Far Out! Sex and death. The only two things in life that really count.”

I was too young then not to believe him.

THE TRUCK STOP PROSTITUTE

Her legs
seem to stretch
for miles

LATE SUMMER

When worms webbed white gloves to branches of trees, the horizon, too, was webbed white with mist.

When we did find courage enough to drive sticks through sacks, only dead leaves remained.

The worms were gone.

Some are Born to be Angels

DAY OF THE DEAD
~In response to 9/11/2001

While I am not Mexican,
this year I will celebrate
the Day of the Dead.
On a three-tiered altar,
I will place candles,
skeletons and skulls.
For those dead who return
I will serve chocolates, fruits,
Day of the Dead bread.
I will provide expensive tequila
and water—plenty of water so that
perhaps some will sing:

Here comes the water
down the slope,
and my skull
is getting wet

There should be photographs
  of the dead on my altar.
    A picture for each departed.
But there are so many,
  and from all over the country,
    from all over the world.
So many dead.
  So many photographs.
    So many ghosts.

BANKS OF THE SEINE AT ARGENTEUIL

~After Edouard Manet

How do you suppose
I should explain your death
to our grieving son
as we stand at an arm
of the great force
which swallowed you
and your ship whole?

At night, on his knees,
he has stopped asking God—
knowing that no matter
how hard he prays
you are not coming home.

Was it the maternal
rocking of waves and

steady hum of wind and sails
that lured you from the land?

Were we ever anything more
than foreign islands of life
in your vast briny world?

My year of mourning has passed,
but for his sake,
I shall continue to wear a chapeau
trimmed in black lace.

And, never take him to the sea.

SOME ARE BORN TO BE ANGELS

~In memory of my eighth-grade student, Kim Hill

It's the gentle look of your face
that I see when I close my eyes,
believing—not until today—
that some are born to be angels.

Yet, despite knowing you are safe
in that Saintlier World, I can't
explain what caused my emotions
to erupt when told of your death.

Perhaps it was knowing that when
your best friends and fellow classmates
learned of your passing, their childhood
innocence would be lost forever.

As other poets before me,
"I wish this poem could be their pain,"
something that could be read and put
away...but that is wishful thinking.

They will have to be content with
knowing that when their lives are con-
fused and without hope, you will be
there to reach down and pick them up.

RELEASE

We are citizens of one world only when we apply to the next.

~Mark Strand

I.

This thing Death confounds me. Is it a life in heaven for eternity? A life reincarnated to some new body? A dissemination of the soul throughout the universe? And what of our thoughts and the thoughts of our loved ones? Do they travel with us to the next world or do they slip away as a fish returned to water?

II.

The old man, two rows in front of us,
slumps. We hear the sound of air escaping
from his lungs. Ball players from both teams
gather to gaze up at the paramedics calmly
working. Some of the players are holding
bats, all are speechless. And like the slow
disappearance of a hard-hit ball, we watch a
bit of innocence drain from their young
faces.

III.

At the funeral, my friend says to her
deceased mother, “I release you.” Closing
my eyes, I again see the little girl who, with
great joy and deliber-ateness, released a red
balloon into the blue sky.

DISTANT MOUNTAINS

~For Brian

It sounds brutal
to us today—
the way Spartans
took infants deemed
too sick and weak
from mothers to
  die lonely deaths.

Soon after your

conception, doctors
suggested tests
for Downs Syndrome
and other defects
should we want
  to abort the pregnancy.

As we listened,
I could see in
your mother's eyes
faint images
of women sobbing
at the base
  of distant mountains.

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

I.
At your funeral mom asked me
to walk with her up to your casket
and "just feel the soft, white cloth."

I had never seen death before,
but I knew it was awful and something
not to be touched by my tiny hand.

II.
In some large room away from the main parlor
where my father slept in a giant metal box,
I sat in a metal chair so large
that I had to sit up straight.

In the doorway dividing the two rooms
stood the funeral director.
He had a pleasant look fixed on his face—
just like the one fixed on my father's.

From somewhere—everywhere,
bells began ringing. They rang until
some other man stood up and read
from a black book that had strings
dangling from the top of it.

When the reading stopped,
and everyone lifted their heads,
the man with the black book
walked over to my mother.

Over their whispers came
the sound of a loud latch—
"A giant suitcase,"
I thought to myself.

III.
How many nights Troubles* and I
waited at the back door,
sure you would reappear,
even after being told you were dead

and never coming home,
I can’t remember.

Within a year, we moved to a new house,
had Troubles put to sleep,
and left me to wonder
when I, too, would join you in death.

V.

From the day you were killed,
until I went away to school,
I slept with the lights on.

For me, darkness was death
and I knew you were there trying
to place your hand on my shoulder.

I didn’t know what you wanted;
I still don’t.

Even after all these years,
when I am alone in the house at night,
I go around and turn on all the lights.

*Troubles was my pet Cocker Spaniel

ON WALKING PAST THE VIETNAM MEMORIAL

Ascending from earth
with V-shaped wings spread wide,
carrying under your blackened feathers
reflections of Washington and Lincoln, you
are no mythical Phoenix rising from
smoldering ash to live again. Your

flight is of a higher destination—
to give some meaning and
honor to all those dead.

THE HAWK

Seeing a hawk dead on the road
is as shocking as a sudden bolt
of lightning on a calm spring evening.

With certainty, I can say it was

hit in pursuit of life it was about
to capture, or had already killed.

Its killing of birds, rabbits, and
rodents is as it should be—
as natural as the wind it rode.

But the death of a hawk by
an automobile or truck?
Why does this stir such pity?

I am relieved to know that crows will
soon encircle the corpse—ensuring,
once again, flight of an unlucky brother.

LEAD POISONING, 1965

Aunt Martha is dead. Cars killed her.
Cars she knew as well as her neighbors.
Cars that were, in fact, owned by her neighbors.
Cars Aunt Martha waved to as they passed.

Cars she rode to town and funerals in.
Cars with teenagers learning to drive.
Cars with tops down and radios blaring.
Cars with strangers stopping to ask directions.
Cars that nearly hit her as excited octogenarians waved.
Cars that pulled over and warmly idled
    next to her as she picked road-side berries.

A COLLECTIVE DREAM

Instead of leaves, miniature bodies of the dead

appear on the trees in and around the cemetery.

Family and loved ones that come to visit point
with excitement when they see Aunt Julie or Grandma Smith or a deceased husband, wife, or child.

The excitement continues until an unusually strong wind comes along and blows the dead away.

For the living, it becomes a topic of conversation
for years, but no one is completely sure it actually
occurred or whether it was just a collective dream.

BECAUSE OF ME

The Search need go no further.
--William Vernon

It is because of my

buying milk in plastic bottles,
drinking from plastic cups,
eating with plastic forks,
using plastic lunch bags, trash bags,
garbage bags,
using plastic-backed disposable diapers
on my son;

it is because of my

cooking with the electric range,
cooking with the microwave,
watching color TV in the family room,
the bed room, the kitchen,
listening to the compact-disc player,
turning on the lamp light, the
hall light, the ceiling light, the
garage light, the outside light;

it is because of my

heating the house in winter,
cooling the house in summer,
burning wood, burning leaves,
burning trash, driving my car;

it is because of my

buying beer in cans,
buying soda in cans,
buying food in cans,
eating foil-wrapped TV dinners;

it is because of my

fertilizing the lawn,
fertilizing the garden,
spraying ants with Raid,
Deconing the roaches,
pouring Drano down the drain;

it is because of me

there is air pollution,
there is water pollution,
there is global warming,
there are oil spills,
there are toxic dumps,
there are poisoned aquifers,
there is death, there is death,
  there is death.

It is because of me
there is death.

Salvador Dali's Mustache

THE PROSE POEM

Just beyond our yard, where the nature preserve starts, was a big rock that looked just like a sleeping bear. Every morning I would look out the window over the sink and think, “That rock looks an awful lot like a sleeping bear.” This morning my wife, as she was looking out the window, announced, “Oh my! I see our bear is gone. Didn’t it look just like a big rock?”

Tired of old men allowing their dogs to poop on my lawn, I asked my gypsy friend to cast one of those “Stop dogs from pooping on your yard” spells. Now, when old men allow their dogs to poop on my lawn, the moment their dog’s poop hits the grass, my lawn transforms into a brown sticky goo. Before the old geezers realize what has happened, their dogs are lost and they are left holding limp leathery straps.

Mona Lisa’s smile has moved into our neighborhood. Daily, faces drive by her house hoping to snatch a glimpse. Once in a while I do see Mona Lisa’s smile peeking out from behind her curtains—but she appears rather reserved and shy. Only on holidays, when Salvador Dali's mustache drops by, do you hear a peep out of her. But when you do, you’d think all hell is breaking loose.

One morning a sunflower poked its head through my open kitchen window. “Say, might you have a spot of tea?” What? “Why yes, you planted me solely to attract goldfinches; it’s the least you can do.” The next morning, there were hundreds of sunflowers, and even more the next, until my entire back yard was filled with sunflowers asking for a spot of tea. When it looked like the situation was hopeless, the yard of sunflowers disappeared under a hovering blanket of gold.

A little girl wanted to play jump rope, but her mother was too poor to buy her one. To keep her little girl happy, the mother made a slit in her abdomen and pulled out her small intestines. For an hour or so, with great delight, the little girl played jump rope with her mother's small intestines. "Oh, mommy, that was so much fun; can I do it again tomorrow?" While the mother taped her abdomen closed, she told her daughter, "We'll see, honey, we'll see."

Knitting has become all the rage with single young ladies. Shelia decided that she would use strands of DNA and knit herself a family. First, she knitted a little girl and then she knitted a little boy. She started to knit a little dog, but it lashed out and bit both of her hands off. “Oh, how terrible! Now I will never be able to knit my children a father!”

The woman yearning for a mate has changed herself into a monarch butterfly and is flying to Mexico. By the time she reaches the border, she realizes that she has been overtaken by reproductive diapause. Out of frustration, the woman who changed herself into a monarch butterfly changes herself into a quail egg and falls to the ground where the rodents, the rodents, the rodents…

The Blue-Plate Special today is pork chops smothered with mushroom clouds. The chef recommends that it be cooked medium-rare because by the time it can be served the meat will be scorched. When the waitress calls out that she wants another “Los

Alamos Special," the chef becomes so pissed he could explode.

Two secrets inhabit the same house. Both know and honor the rules of secrecy. One secret belongs to the husband. The other belongs to the wife. Sometimes the two secrets bump into one another. When this occurs, they both take care to

avoid each other’s eyes. Both secrets are suspicious of its spouse and what is being kept secret. Both secrets fear they are, in fact, the same secret.

My mother is standing over a large wok pan scrap-ing the scales off a large fish. My dead

father is outside looking in. I have to admit he looks pretty good for being six months dead. I say to my mo-ther, “I thought dad only liked catfish?” Without pausing from her task, she replies, “That was when he was alive. He’ll eat anything now. Except these damn cucumbers.”

My mom got a chuckle out of this poem.

Punctuation has gone off on a long holiday to one of those Oceanic islands no one has ever heard of. On the wall of its hut, punctuation writes, “Language is the tool by which culture is passed from one gener-ation to the next.” When punctuation does not return, I know it’s turned into a silent revolution.

LAYERS: Two Essays Toward Understanding the Prose Poem

So I decided to cut loose and give emphasis to the imagination rather than to the line.

David Ignatow

One

Up until the twentieth century, poetry in the English lan-guage was dominated by strictly metered lines that rhymed. Because the meter specified a line's length, little attention had to be paid to line breaks. Therefore, once the writer deter-mined the subject of the poem, it was his/ her job—while working within the confines of acceptable meter and rhyme—to hammer out a poem.

Finding both fixed meter and rhyme to be roadblocks in communicating ideas or emotions, poets abandoned end-rhyme and fixed meter in favor of free verse (meter more natural and more reflective of the poet's voice). In doing so, great attention was drawn to the use of line breaks.

Unlike metered verse, where the writer relies on a set number of feet to determine a line's length, a writer of free verse relies on the meaning or the emotion of words them-selves. Other times, a line break reflects a half- or full-pause in a sentence. Some writers utilize a line break in such a way that it leads the reader's eyes to the next line. However, for

most writers of free verse, the rationale behind a line's length is much more arbitrary.

But regardless of whether a writer chooses to write metered verse or free verse, the "music" of the poem (created in part through rhyme, meter, and line breaks) is as important as the idea or intended image of the poem. It is this—the music/ image duality—the prose poet rejects. To the prose poet, the "music," brought into being through the manipulation of rhyme, meter, and line breaks, serves only as noise disrupting the image.

This is not to imply that prose poetry is absent of its own music—any good piece of literature is musical. But to prevent the disruption caused by rhyme, meter, and line breaks, the prose poet uses as his/her main unit of composition the sentence. "The sentence… while it does contain rhythmic patterns, has as its core a visual bias" (Stephen Fredman). This, then, allows the prose poet to squarely focus on the intended image.

Two

Appearing like a solitary outcrop of rock on the poetic landscape is the prose poem. Although Americans are at last embracing this form, little has been written about it. Hoping not to belittle the thing, I offer some generally accepted notions about the prose poem.

The prose poem is short, rarely more than a page or two in length.

Because the prose poem embraces the sentence, it is written as blocks of paragraphs.

Rhyme and meter virtually disappear or are hidden snugly within the text. What replaces rhyme and meter for some writers is a concentration on the syntax of the sentence.

Titles are brief, usually a single word relating to the story, object or image of the poem.

Although the repetition of verse is dropped, repetition of a word or phrase may be used to bind the text.

While some prose poems are descriptive, anecdotal stories, others lean toward the fable. But instead of teaching moral lessons, the stories turn fictitious to the point of becoming surrealistic.

At the center of many prose poems is an object or image. Here the author uses whatever means or devices necessary to explore its thickness. Other times, it may be movement away from the object which drives the poem.

Exploring an object's duality is also a favorite with prose poets. For instance, the image or object described is so out of keeping with ordinary assumptions about it, the reader cannot keep from contrasting it with what is thought to be "normal." Sometimes, an image or object is presented in such a way as to highlight the differences between what "appears" to be with what, in fact, "is."

Because of the rebellious nature of the prose poem, the abandonment of even the broadest rules of meter and rhyme, and the adoption of the sentence, it is difficult to say anything too definitive about the form. Perhaps this aura of uncharted waters is fueling an interest in the prose poem. Whatever the

cause, it is something limited only by one’s imagination.

Where some of the poems first appeared.

Print publications:
Active Voice, Amber, Archer, Buckeye Country, Black River Review, Canto, Cleveland Review, Coventry Reader, Cokefish, Canvass, Conflict of Interest , Crystal Rainbow, Dreamscape, Daring Poetry Quarterly, Déjà vu (Kent State), Ear of Corn, Flights, GoodSAMARatin, Guts & Grace, Having Writ, Hungry Bear, Impetus, Live Writers, Lilliput, Masques, Modern Images, Promise You Press, Pteranodon, Pudding, Poetry in the Parks: 1989, Ptolemy, Plain Brown Wrapper, Samisdat, Singing Off Key, Spindrift, Solo Flyer, Sunday Independent, Ashland, Ky., Thirteen, Unity Church of Truth Newsletter, Vincent Brothers Review, Wurdz, Whiskey Island Magazine, Unfeigned Coffee Fiend.

Anthologies:
80 on the 80s: Ashland Poetry Press
Light Year '86: Bits Press, Case Western Reserve
Listening to the Birth of Crystals: England
To Have and To Hold: New York, NY
And What Rough Beast: Ashland Poetry Press
Above Us Only Sky: Incarnate Muse, CA

Web publications:
iranian.com, bigtoereview, alongstoryshort, threecandles, a-pos-tro-phe, poetsagainstwar, thehissquarterly, autumnleaves, mamazine, redhandpress, ditchpoetry, deepcleveland, riverwalkjournal, poetrycemetery, theversemarauder, realeightview, colorwheeljournal, problemchildmagazine, writeoff, octavesmagazine, fullcirclemagazine, pinkmousepub, bluemoosepress, flaskfeview,

ancientheartmagazine, zafusy, offcourse, thebluehouse, ahapoetry,

Bus Poem Projects:
RTA Cleveland, Ohio
SARTA Canton, Ohio

A print-based chapbook:
Children of Iran, GoodSAMARatin Press: Thailand

A web-based chapbook:
Buffalo Time @ www.ahapoetry.com/BVL/mccoy.html

Web & print based chapbooks:
A Book of Afternoon Naps @ http://scars.tv/pdf/BOOK-OF-AFTERNOON-NAPS.pdf

The Clarity of Clouds @ http://origamicondom.org/Chapbooks/DBMcCoy.01.pdf

David B. McCoy earned his history teaching degree from Ashland University and his graduate degree from Kent State University. After teaching thirty-two years, David retired to write short books on a wide variety of topics. Before turning to non-fiction, he spent nearly 40 years studying and writing poetry.

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Short non-fiction, history-related publications

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